

A detailed mosaic of the Apostle Paul, depicted with a long, dark beard and hair, wearing a purple and gold robe. He holds a book with a blue cover and gold dots. The background is a golden mosaic with a halo. On the left, the Greek letters 'CR' and 'AN' are visible. On the right, the Greek letters 'Π', 'Α', 'Β', 'Γ', 'Δ' are visible.

PAUL

The Apostle's Life, Letters,
and Thought

E. P. SANDERS

Paul

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Fortress Press
Minneapolis

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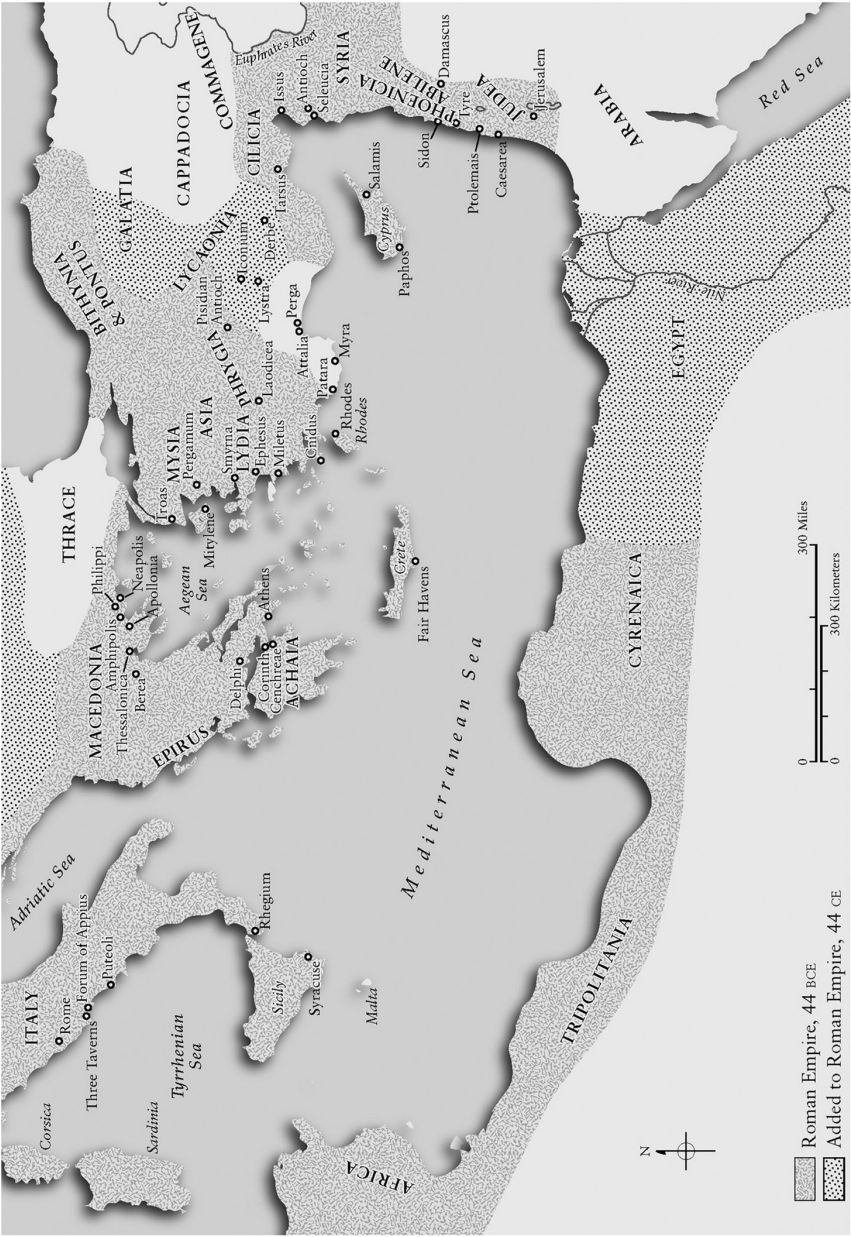
For Becky, with love and thanks

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Preface

This book has been written over a long stretch of time. When I finished *Judaism: Practice and Belief* in 1991 (published 1992), I had published a book a year for four years: *Studying the Synoptic Gospels* (with Margaret Davies) in 1989; *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah* in 1990; *Paul: Past Master* in 1991; the aforementioned *Judaism: Practice and Belief* in 1992. I planned to write a book on Jesus and one on Paul for the elusive “ordinary reader.” I managed to complete *The Historical Figure of Jesus* in 1993 (published 1994), and I promised the publishers a similar book on Paul in the near future.

I knew that I was tired, but I was used to working hard when tired, and so for a while it seemed possible. But I was thoroughly used up; my brain did not want to work properly; my back resented my sitting at the keyboard for hours on end; and my energy declined. I reluctantly decided to save the “little” book on Paul until I retired, as I expected to do in the next two or three years.

I wrote little bits of the book from time to time. In 2005, when I finally retired, I sat down to write it. My brain still resisted. I went into a post-retirement slump, lacking ambition and vitality. A series of health issues arose in 2008, a year spent mostly in doctors’ offices—or so it seemed at the time. I considered asking a former student to finish the book, but I found that giving it up was even

harder than working on it. Finally, in 2013, I regained enough of my energy to make my brain work and to sit at the keyboard for several hours a day.

This long tale helps to explain some of the book's peculiarities. Because I thought of a book for undergraduates, I had originally intended not to debate with other scholars and not to use a lot of footnotes or endnotes—just the bare necessities. I believe that I succeeded fairly well on the first goal, not debating with other scholars. In any case, I could not conceivably do justice to the academic literature on Paul for the twenty years during which the book was “in the works.”

I could not resist, however, paying some attention to scholarly *positions* in order to set my own off more clearly. This has led to sporadic and probably eccentric footnoting. There is no academic principle by which I decided to cite this work and not to refer to that work, and my neglect extends to supporters and allies as well as to opponents. I discussed other literature on the Great Apostle when my memory (rather than systematic searching) brought something so forcefully to mind that I had to mention it. Because of the principle of memory called “first in, last out,” I usually remembered older literature rather than recent literature. I have avoided giving a “roll call” of the scholars who have held certain opinions, though in one or two cases I refer to originators or major early contributors of specific issues, such as the Ephesian imprisonment.

Most of the notes provide either more detail, cross-references to related discussions elsewhere in the book (since topics repeat throughout Paul's letters), or to my own lengthier discussions in other publications. I have learned enormously from others, especially in debates with them, but in the notes there are only occasional clues that this is the case.

Though I have learned from others, I must admit that the book

primarily rests on my own previous work on Paul and my continued rereading of the letters since my last publication. The newest aspect of the present book is its completeness. Previously I have written on selected themes and aspects of Paul, but this book includes everything I know (or think I know) about his life, his mission, his letters, and his thought. It is “the complete Paul”—as complete as I can make it.

The book falls into two halves: introductory essays on Paul’s life and environment, and **exegesis**¹ of the text of his letters. The amount of detail varies, depending on the level of difficulty of the text and what I perceive to be especially important and interesting. Some passages are summarized briefly, while in other parts of Paul’s correspondence the explanation of Paul’s meaning becomes a word-by-word commentary.

Because there are comments on parts of the text that are not quoted, the reader will need to have a Bible close at hand. There are numerous discussions that will make much more sense if one reads the biblical passages along with the book.

My first conception of the book (with no academic debates, few footnotes) was that it should be fairly brief. But another conception grew in importance as I wrote. I had long wished that I could cover Paul thoroughly in undergraduate lectures, and so I said to myself that I would put into the new book all of the material that I would have put into lectures and classes for undergraduate students if there had been “world enough and time.” These two aims came into conflict, and the desire for completeness won. Thus the book is longer and denser than I had originally hoped. When I counted the pages, I was amazed at the length of the book; but, having explained everything about Paul that I could, I was not going to delete sections.

I believe that there is nothing in the book that an “ordinary reader”

1. Technical terms appear in boldface and are defined in the glossary.

cannot comprehend. On the other hand, the book's length and my insistence on explaining passages in detail will require a good deal of determination on the part of a non-expert who wants to read it all.

The "ideal reader" will be someone who has a fair bit of knowledge about Christianity and religion in general. Undergraduates who are specializing in Christianity or biblical studies and beginning graduate students in New Testament and related fields should find the book especially useful. Perhaps needless to say, I hope for reactions from my scholarly colleagues in New Testament studies.

A main theme of the work is that one must distinguish Paul's arguments from his conclusions, and that it is the arguments that give Paul the reputation of being difficult to understand. He argued like what he was: a first-century Jew. We are not accustomed to those forms of argumentation, and so they are difficult.

Not infrequently, readers will mistake an argument, or even a part of an argument, as the main point, and miss or downplay Paul's own conclusion. I have tried to explain how the arguments work. That is why the book is denser than I originally intended. One cannot explain 1 Cor. 10:1-14 without going into details, and details can be tedious.

Thus the beginning student or the non-academic reader will find that parts of the book are heavy going. It will take diligence and a lot of interest in Paul to go through them all. I do not think that Paul's arguments are too difficult for a university undergraduate to understand, but he or she may think that understanding them is more effort than the result is worth. I hope that some will accept the challenge. And I comfort myself with the thought that readers can skip some of the details and read the conclusions.

I am indebted to several people for advice and assistance. Conversation with Richard Hays clarified a few points, for which I

am grateful. I also wish to thank Dr. Jane Dysart, who served as non-professional reader, and whose comments were useful at many points.

In the final days of preparing the typescript for the press, Megan Chobot typed the draft of the subject index with remarkable speed and accuracy, which saved me dozens and dozens of hours of work, and I thank her heartily.

The staff at Fortress were unfailingly helpful, and they were considerate of my difficulties, which include poor eyesight and limited working hours.

I wish to single out Dr. Neil Elliott, Acquiring Editor in Biblical Studies, for help far above and beyond what one ordinarily expects. He made dozens of improvements to the manuscript, both of style and content. His knowledge of Paul's letters and issues of interpretation came to my rescue time after time. He proofread the final text so thoroughly that I had very little to do. I am deeply indebted to him, and without his assistance I would still be re-reading and re-writing.

My main advisor and assistant, however, was my much beloved wife, Dr. Rebecca Gray, who, in addition to holding down a full-time job, read the typescript twice and made copious notes. Discussion of her remarks and suggestions always led to greater clarity. She composed and inserted all of the headings and sub-headings—which, of course, required reading the manuscript one more time. She edited a difficult subject index, which allowed us almost to meet the publisher's deadline. In these and other ways Becky made the book quite a lot better than it would have been without her efforts.

In fact, without her I could not get along at all.

Becky kept my spirits up when I thought that I would never be able to finish the book, and in this task she had an assistant, whom I also wish to thank, though she will never be able to read these

PAUL

words: Our Little Daisy, a dog of Beagle/Corgi/Dachshund mix, who bucked me up whenever I was glum. (With apologies to Alan Jay Lerner.)

E. P. Sanders

Durham, North Carolina, October 2015

Introduction

Paul, apostle of Jesus Christ, was one of the greatest religious leaders of all time. He is also one of the very few from the ancient world whom we can study firsthand thanks to the fact that he wrote letters and that some of them were saved, edited (very slightly), and published. We have no idea how many letters Paul wrote to churches and individuals during his apostolic career. From those that we have, however, we learn a great deal about the world in which he lived, his activities, his personality, his assistants and colleagues, his enemies, his churches, and, most interesting of all, his thought. Throughout his life, Paul was passionately committed to his cause: first the cause of persecuting the Jews who were followers of Jesus, then of spreading the movement that he had formerly tried to stamp out. His letters express his passion; it is one of their most striking features. In this work I have tried to let Paul, the passionate man who was obsessed with his cause, shine through his sometimes difficult theological arguments.

Paul was controversial in his own day. He had heated—almost violent—arguments with other members of the early Christian movement. He denounced his opponents in vivid terms, and his letters have inspired religious polemicists (people who wage verbal warfare) for centuries.

Since Paul's letters are occasional and informal (rather than being polished and revised for wide use), we have an intimate portrait of him and his thought. The letters are sometimes movingly self-revealing, as when he is pushed to boasting by the Corinthian opposition. He sometimes bares his soul in a way that is very rare in ancient literature.

Odd though it may seem, we know Jesus less well than Paul. Some of Jesus' words and deeds are found in the Gospels, but the Gospels were written one or two generations after his death, and they made use of sources of varying reliability. Moreover, there are four Gospels, and each of the authors had his own views, with the result that Jesus is depicted somewhat differently from Gospel to Gospel. In my own judgment, however, the most serious problem in getting close to the historical Jesus is that the *context* in which he uttered his memorable sayings is usually uncertain, since many of the teachings of Jesus appear in different contexts in the Gospels. This deprives us of precise understanding. For example, he said, "Love your enemies" (Matt. 5:43). This is important as a generalization, but it would be nice to know if he had any enemies in particular in mind—Herod Antipas? Caiaphas? Pilate? A local landowner?¹

The study of Paul is largely free of these problems. We have entire letters responding to problems in various churches. It is relatively simple to infer the circumstances or context from Paul's answers and arguments. Moreover, his letters do not reveal heavy editing or revision. We sometimes suspect that a later editor, possibly the person or persons who collected his letters (see chap. 6), merged parts of two or more letters or rearranged some of the material (as we shall see when we investigate 2 Corinthians and Philippians), but there are

1. Herod Antipas was the ruler of Galilee, where Jesus grew up; Caiaphas was the high priest, who also was the local ruler of Jerusalem when Jesus was crucified; Pilate was a Roman appointee who oversaw the whole of Jewish Palestine from his base in Caesarea, on the coast.

only a few substantial problems in deciding what he wrote and the circumstances in which he wrote it.

Paul dictated to a scribe, whom we would call a secretary, but his letters seem to have been sent off unrevised, with occasional broken sentences or jarring syntax. We probably have pretty well what he himself actually dictated. The secretary played a minor role—far, far less than the authors of the Gospels.² The consequence is that we are reading Paul's own words, whereas we have nothing that Jesus himself wrote, and only second- or third-hand reports of his teaching.

Paul's surviving letters give us the earliest information about Christianity and how it was established in various cities in the Roman Empire. Paul was active as an apostle in the 30s, 40s, and 50s of the Common Era (CE). The Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles (Acts), which refer to earlier events, were actually written later than Paul's letters, in the 70s to 90s.

Paul would be one of the most interesting people in the ancient world to study even if he occupied a smaller place in history. But, of course, he is one of the most influential figures in the history of the Near East and the West. Paul was trying to convert gentiles (non-Jews) to worship the God of Israel and to accept Jesus as Son of God and savior of the world. Other missionaries had this same task, but Paul was the preeminent "apostle to the gentiles." He faced the problem of thinking up new theological expressions and new practices for a movement that, though deeply rooted in Judaism and thus in some ways old, was partly new.

It need hardly be added that the Christian movement became a largely gentile religion and that it took over the ancient Western world and part of the Near East, supplanting all the other religions in those regions except its parent, Judaism. In the course of Christian

2. Some scholars dispute this view of Paul's letters. See below, ch. 6 n. 6.

history, many of the greatest theologians, such as Augustine and Luther, were heavily indebted to Paul. Reformers, in particular, have drawn on Paul's prose in the controversies of their own times.

This enormous influence is the result of the power of his letters. His own personality was doubtless powerful in his day, but his historical importance does not rest on the number of people whom he converted, nor on the subsequent importance of the congregations that he founded. The "big three" centers of Christianity would become Rome, Antioch in Syria, and Alexandria in Egypt. Paul founded none of these churches. Thus Christianity would have spread without him, but without his letters to help shape the thought of the most important Christians, its history would have been quite different.

Sources

Of the twenty-seven books in the New Testament, thirteen are attributed to Paul, and approximately half of another, the book of Acts, deals with Paul. In short, we owe about half of the New Testament to Paul and the people whom he influenced. There are, however, very serious doubts about the authenticity of six of the letters, and several reservations about the reliability of Acts. We shall consider aspects of Acts in discussing Paul's biography, but I shall not debate the authenticity of letters that are disputed. This has been done extensively in the history of New Testament scholarship, and it is easy to find discussions of authorship. In chapter six I shall say a few more words about the letters that are classed as "deuteropauline"—that is, letters belonging to the Pauline school, but not written by Paul himself.

In the main body of the book (Part II) we shall study in detail the **seven undisputed Pauline letters**, those generally accepted as having been directly dictated by Paul himself. Paul doubtless wrote many

more letters, now lost, but we must rely on the seven letters that we have. In the sequence in which they occur in the New Testament, the seven undisputed letters are these: Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon.³

We shall, however, consider them in their approximate chronological sequence, except for Philemon, a one-page personal letter that cannot be dated, with which we shall begin. The resulting order, which will govern Part II, is this: Philemon, 1 Thessalonians, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians 10–13, 2 Corinthians 1–9, Galatians, Philippians, and Romans. In the chapters on the Corinthian correspondence I shall explain why 2 Corinthians 10–13 is chronologically earlier than 1 Corinthians 1–9.

The deuteropauline letters—the letters that are attributed to Paul, but which were written in his name, rather than by him—are Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus.

The Conclusion offers a summary of some of the main theological points of the letters.

The Text of the Letters

A frequently asked question is whether or not we have Paul's actual letters. The short answer is "no," but the question requires a brief explanation of textual history. The original of each letter was sent to the church or individual to whom Paul wrote. As far as we can tell, he did not have his secretary make a copy for his own future use. He wrote ad hoc letters directed to specific problems and situations, and he seems to have given no thought to producing a systematic statement of his views — though Romans reveals reflection on previous disputes, and is in part a revision of some of Galatians

3. On the letters that are deuteropauline or tritopauline (written by members of his "school" in the generation or so after his death), see below, pp. 150–55.

and 1 Corinthians. Despite this, it too is a specific letter, addressed to a specific church, and dealing with immediate and concrete issues.

Sometime after he wrote the letters, and probably after his death, a follower went around to each of his churches, or at least several of them, and collected, edited, and published what Paul had written (see chap. 6). The editing, as we noted above, was very light, but we shall see a few traces of it. For the present, let us simply say that Paul's letters were collected and published.

To publish a book in the ancient world the author or editor merely copied and circulated it. Multiple copies could be made in the following way: a reader stood at the back of a room and read the text, while a number of scribes copied from his dictation. The copies were proofread, and errors were corrected, either by writing the correct text above the word or phrase in question, or by marginal annotation. These copies, of course, could later be copied in the same way, or an individual scribe could produce a single copy. We do not know how Paul's letters were copied in the first place, whether by a roomful of scribes or a single scribe. In any case, after the correspondence was compiled, multiple copies were made and sent to various Christian churches. When the occasion arose, either because a copy wore out or because new churches wanted their own scrolls containing Paul's letters, further copies were made.

Inevitably errors crept in (some due to scribal "improvements"), and slightly divergent texts arose. All of the earliest copies of Paul's letters have been lost. A few second-century fragments have been found, but we do not have a full text of Paul's letters that was copied earlier than the fourth century. Scholars study these fragments and the earliest manuscripts, as well as the thousands of later manuscripts, to determine textual *families*. The ancestors of each family no longer exist, but they can be inferred from surviving manuscripts. I shall present a schematic chart that reveals the process:

In order that in Christ Jesus the *blessing* of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the *blessing* of the Spirit through faith.

In the line that mentions the Spirit, which is earlier—“promise of the Spirit” or “blessing of the Spirit”? Several well-regarded manuscripts support each reading. In this case, a specialist in textual variants (a text critic) must argue solely on the basis of intrinsic probability. Would a scribe have been more likely to change “promise” to “blessing” or “blessing” to “promise”? The former is more likely, since the argument is smoother if Paul wrote *blessing* both times: the blessing of Abraham comes to the gentiles, the blessing of the Spirit comes to us. Scribes would have been less likely to change from “blessing” to “promise.” To determine the better reading, we reverse the probable scribal preference and follow the manuscripts in which first “blessing” then “promise” appears.

Arguments of this sort are not absolutely conclusive, but they are the best we can do: we develop hypotheses about preferred scribal “improvements” of the text and then follow readings that are against those tendencies.

Thus on the basis of the study of families of manuscripts and individual textual variants, scholars over the last 150 years or so have developed **critical texts**: texts based on manuscripts and on choices among them that are governed by scholarly argument. A good critical text has lots of footnotes giving variants and the evidence for them.

This may sound more uncertain than it is. There are not very many substantial questions about what Paul wrote. In the present case, for example, we would understand him perfectly well if we read “blessing” in both instances. Nevertheless, when we read Paul’s letters in Greek, we are reading a reconstructed text, based on comparing and studying many underlying manuscripts.

Most of us, however, actually read translations of a reconstructed text. A translation never captures the full meaning of the original, and this fact accounts for the existence of so many translations of famous books. Translations of the Bible are especially numerous. They are produced either by individuals or by committees of scholars. The best English translations overall are the official translations produced by groups of scholars: the Revised Standard Version, the New Revised Standard Version, the Jerusalem Bible, the New English Bible, and the New International Version. My own preference is the Revised Standard Version, but since it is no longer readily available I shall usually quote from the New Revised Standard Version. I shall sometimes, however, alter the wording slightly in order to present the literal translation of the Greek. And frequently I shall cite two or more translations of crucial words and phrases.

Thus we shall often have occasion to examine the question of the best translation of specific words and phrases. The comparison of different translations with the original Greek text is one of the features of this book. This can be a little tedious, but I think that it is a mistake for people to regard the text of “the Bible” as being the same as the text of their translation, and some comparisons will make this clear. It will turn out that modern translators, just like ancient scribes, tend to shape the text according to their own preferences.

The Goals of the Present Book

To start with, I wish to try to give the reader some “feel” for the ancient world and what Paul’s life was actually like. For this reason, there is a fairly substantial section (Part I) on Paul’s life, which attempts to situate him in his world. I have somewhat reluctantly decided not to offer a thumbnail sketch of the Roman Empire in Paul’s day and the history of Judaism, though both are extremely important if one is to understand Paul. My experience as a reader is

that thumbnail sketches of Judaism and the Greco-Roman world are too brief to do much good.

Instead, I discuss various aspects of the historical circumstances as they arise in the study of Paul's letters. For example, paganism is discussed in relation to 1 Thessalonians, and Greek and Jewish sexual mores are considered in the chapters on 1 Corinthians. Judaism is discussed extensively in chapter three, on Paul's life before his conversion to Christianity.

The principal aim of this book, however, is to explain the contents of the letters. Understanding Paul's letters requires us to study the *topics* or *issues* that he addressed; his *conclusions* with regard to each point; and his *arguments* in favor of his *conclusions*. I put topics, conclusions, and arguments in this sequence because I think that his conclusions usually came before his arguments—as is the case with most of us. Over a long period of time we may come to a certain conviction, but we may not arrange neat arguments in favor of it unless we need to defend it or wish to persuade someone else that it is true.

At their very best, humans can change their minds because of argumentation, and in this case it is easy for them to repeat the arguments that they found persuasive. But often finding the best argument to support one of our conclusions requires some experimentation. This can sometimes be seen in Paul's letters.

Paul was a debater of considerable variety and great power. His arguments in favor of his convictions are often stirring—so stirring that one or more of them may be taken to be the very heart of his entire message. But we should assume that his conclusions were what mattered to him. If he produced four arguments in favor of the same point, it is unreasonable to think that one of these arguments was more important to him than the conclusion.

Paul was an ancient Jew, and so he argued like an ancient Jew,

backing up his views by quotation from his Scripture. We shall see that Paul's arguments, though scholarly in his day, are unlike those of modern scholars who argue about the meaning of texts.

It is not clear how well his original readers followed his arguments, since he sometimes explained his positions by debating at his own level, which was that of an expert, not at the level of the recipients of the letters. In our time, this is sometimes the case when a doctor or lawyer speaks to a patient or client. For this reason, Paul's arguments usually require some explanation. Some of them are self-evident even today and even in translation. Many, however, are relatively opaque to the modern reader; some of them absolutely require study of Paul's text in Greek; and some require study of the **Septuagint**, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible.

The New Testament book 2 Peter famously states, "there are some things in them [Paul's letters] hard to understand" (2 Pet. 3:16). Most of these things are *arguments*. Paul's conclusions are generally perfectly clear, but the logic of his reasoning is often difficult to follow. Many, many of the pages of this book are dedicated to explaining Paul's arguments.

If the conclusions are usually easy to understand and the arguments difficult, what about the *topics*? We might imagine they are obvious. Unfortunately for the reader, that is not always the case. When I taught Paul to undergraduates at Duke University, I started the course with this assignment: "Read 1 Thessalonians, note the topics, and in one sentence write a statement of each topic in your own words." This occasionally met ridicule: it's too easy. How stupid does he think we are?

In the hundreds of assignments that I read over the years, only one student correctly listed all of the topics of 1 Thessalonians. The topic of 1 Thess. 4:13-15 proved especially difficult. Everyone saw that 4:16-17 is about the resurrection, but the point of the previous

three verses was almost always missed. No, the students were not stupid, but the content and implication of those verses were totally unexpected and therefore incomprehensible. We cannot “see” what we cannot understand, and so our eyes just pass over it, just as they do when, reading our own language, we suddenly encounter words in a language we do not know. We just skip them.

In other cases, we understand the subject well enough, but not what the topic meant in the ancient world. We recognize, for example, that sexual morality is the topic of 1 Thess. 4:3-7, and everyone comprehends what sexual morality is. Without study, however, we do not perceive the contrast that Paul is drawing between “you,” his gentile converts in Thessalonica, and “the gentiles” (v. 5). His converts should not do something or other “like the gentiles.” This requires a little sorting out.

That is to say, not only are Paul’s arguments difficult to comprehend, but often even the topics need substantial explanation.

I have discussed topics, conclusions, and arguments, which can be studied on the page. We must also consider *reasons*: *why* did Paul come to the conclusion to which he came? That is seldom on the page in clear words, and finding Paul’s reasons requires reading his mind. This is a less certain enterprise than the study of arguments, but I believe that in some cases we can actually do it. If Paul says enough about a topic, we may discern the reason for which he held a specific view.

A final aim of the book is to regard all of the topics, conclusions, and arguments as important. Usually *theology* is privileged, which means that more time is spent on Galatians and Romans than on the other letters. Or one may be in search of *social history*, in which case 1 Corinthians comes to the fore. I shall regard 1 Thessalonians—which sometimes is barely noticed in general books on Paul—as being just as important for understanding Paul as is Romans—though undoubtedly

the theology is less profound. It nevertheless tells us a lot about Paul and his mission.

The Significance of Chronological Order

I have come to the view, which is now a minority opinion, that the study of the *development* of Paul's thought is worthwhile. Thirty-nine years ago, when I was committing youthful follies (rather than those of senescence), I thought that it was not,⁴ but my own thought on this has developed. I now think that Paul's thought becomes clearer when we study the letters in chronological order. Some of the large topics of Paul's thought, such as participation in Christ and righteousness by faith, have, in my view, developed in the course of Paul's ministry. Many scholars have found development in Paul's **eschatological** passages—those concerning the “last things,” such as the return of the Lord and the resurrection of the dead. We shall consider this in detail when studying the Corinthian correspondence. Moreover, our study of *suffering* and *the Spirit* in Paul's letters will reveal the development or growth of his ideas. I think that, once we read Paul's letters in chronological sequence, growth, development, or evolution will become apparent.

Because most studies of Paul's thought have concentrated on his theology, his letter to the Romans has often dominated the author's view.⁵ Romans is placed first in the Bible; it is a long letter; there are lots of theological themes; there is some reconsideration of topics in previous letters; it is the most profound and at the same time most difficult letter in the Pauline corpus. Moreover, Protestant scholars find it to be supportive of Luther's theology, and Protestant

4. See E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 432–33 n. 9.

5. James Dunn offers several reasons to justify giving primacy to Romans in writing a theology of Paul: *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (London: T&T Clark, 1998), 25–26. If one is trying to write a theology to guide Protestant belief, these are important considerations. We do not, however, understand the life and work and thought of Paul by focusing on one letter.

scholarship has dominated Pauline studies for centuries. The importance of Romans seems to blind people to the significance of Paul's theological statements in the letters written prior to Galatians and Romans.

I do not wish to downgrade Romans, but rather to elevate the importance of the "lesser" letters. We do that by reading them in order and seeing what we find. This would be true even if we were solely studying theology. In addition to wanting to understand his thought, however, the present book aims at describing and explaining Paul the man and his career; his personality; successes and failures; disagreements among the apostles; the process of starting Christianity in various places; how it fit into the Roman Empire and the Jewish Diaspora; and the like. This not to reduce the importance of Paul's theological thought. Although I have no desire to try to create a synthesis of "Paul's theology" in order to produce a system, I would like to understand each theological point in its context.

Reading the letters in chronological order requires, of course, knowing the chronology. Despite some uncertainties, there is widespread (not universal) agreement on a few main points: 1 Thessalonians is the earliest surviving letter, Romans the last. (Romans replays some of the disputes in Galatians and 1 Corinthians.) First Corinthians was written before 2 Corinthians. Most of the letters were written during the same general period: after an apostolic conference in Jerusalem and before Paul raised money to take to Jerusalem in order to support the Christians there. (This act of charity led to his trial and arrest.) Only 1 Thessalonians comes from an earlier period, prior to the apostolic conference.

Where to put Galatians and Philippians is usually seen as less certain. They are before Romans, but the relationship of each to 1 and 2 Corinthians is more difficult to determine. There are also substantial

debates about how the various parts of 2 Corinthians (apparently composed of sections of more than one letter) relate to each other.

A full treatment of the chronology of the letters requires a book and, fortunately, Gregory Tatum has recently published it.⁶ His work makes the present book possible—though in some instances I have not followed his precise chronology.⁷ Nevertheless, his book relieves me of the necessity of including a major section on chronological issues and problems. In the appropriate places I shall point out the key passages that lead to the chronology used here, such as why it is best to put 2 Corinthians 10–13 before 2 Corinthians 1–9.⁸

As stated earlier, I shall treat the letters in the following order: Philemon, 1 Thessalonians, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians 10–13, 2 Corinthians 1–9, Galatians, Philippians, and Romans. This sequence includes some simplifications and leaves out of account some possible rearrangements of a few parts of Paul's letters. I shall discuss some of the complications in the appropriate chapters.

The only chronological issue with which we are presently concerned is the *sequence of the letters*. We shall not reconsider the even more vexed issue of precise dates, such as the year of the Jerusalem conference and the date of Paul's work in Corinth.⁹ As

6. Gregory Tatum, *New Chapters in the Life of Paul: The Relative Chronology of His Career*, Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series 41 (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2006).

7. It is probable that 2 Corinthians 1–9 was written after Galatians, but the arrangement of the present book makes it much more convenient to consider it together with the rest of the Corinthian correspondence. I shall, however, consider part of 2 Corinthians 1–9 (2 Cor. 3:7–18) in connection with Philippians.

8. My first effort to work through the letters in chronological sequence was during a graduate seminar at Duke University on resurrection in Paul's letters, which I led in the early 1990s.

9. The study of calendar dates in Paul's life is very difficult, but there have been distinguished and enlightening studies. Books available in English include John Knox, *Chapters in a Life of Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1950); Robert Jewett, *A Chronology of Paul's Life* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979); Gerd Lüdemann, *Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles: Studies in Chronology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984). Knox stated the right principle of establishing Paul's chronology, which is to follow the letters rather than Acts. On the few occasions when I use a calendar date, I follow Lüdemann.

noted above, Paul wrote his letters in the 40s and 50s of the first century CE, and that is adequate information for our purposes (see also pp. 163–65).

I have worried and fretted about repetition. Some repetition is useful (to recall certain points, for emphasis, etc.), but too much repetition is tiresome for the reader. The scheme of this book requires repetition. I go through each letter, paragraph by paragraph, sometimes word by word, in chronological order. Many topics appear in more than one of Paul's letters; some topics occur repeatedly. To some degree this can be handled by using cross-references, but turning back and forth through a book to compare passages that are related to each other is also tedious. I would rather err on the side of repetition than to rely too heavily on cross-references.

To make matters slightly worse, I sometimes pull related passages that deal with large and complicated issues (such as the resurrection) out of their chronological order so that we can consider them all together. But then I have to say *something* about each one in its own context.

I hope that this explanation is an adequate apology to those who find too much repetition for their liking.

Genre of the Book

One last introductory note, which is of great importance: This book is a historical study of Paul, what he did, what he wrote, and what he thought. It is not about “what Christians ought to believe.” Throughout my life, when I have said something or other about Paul (or Jesus or the Gospels), someone has asked, “Do you mean that we should believe . . . ?” I do not know what other people *ought* to believe—except that they should love all other humans and protect

the universe from destruction. Christianity flourishes in part because of its variety and its multiplicity of forms, creeds, and practices. Some of the forms of Christianity—like some of the forms of other religions—have been inimical to human welfare, and I think that people ought to give them up, since they oppose any of the conceivable lists of “core Christian beliefs.”

In any case, I do not have any desire to tell other people what to believe about God, Christ, the resurrection, and so on. I am not a theologian. In the sections on theology I intend only to explain what Paul thought—and sometimes, of course, what other people then thought.

PART I

Paul's Life

Overview

Our knowledge of Paul's life is fragmentary, and for some parts we can give only the barest sketch, though some aspects of his life permit more detailed examination. First I shall give a very brief overview of Paul's life. The following two chapters will give fuller descriptions of Paul's life, first before his call to be an apostle, and then after his call.¹ I shall put the appropriate chapter numbers or page numbers in parentheses.

A Brief Sketch

Paul was a Greek-speaking Jew from Tarsus (Acts 22:3), a city near the southeast corner of Asia Minor (present-day Turkey). The date of

1. On Paul's biography, see especially John Knox, *Chapters in a Life of Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1950). The book is still well worth reading, especially for the question of the use of Acts in reconstructing Paul's biography. See "The Nature of our Sources" and "The Use of our Sources" on pp. 13–43. More recently, see Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996); Martin Hengel, *The Pre-Christian Paul* (London: SCM, 1991); Martin Hengel and Anna Maria Schwemer, *Paul Between Damascus and Antioch* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997). For the very difficult problem of chronology (matching the events in Paul's life to precise dates), see the Introduction n. 9.

his birth is unknown, but he was in the prime of life in the 40s and 50s of the first century CE. From this we may infer that he was born about the same time as Jesus or a little later, let us say between the year 4 Before the Common Era (BCE) and 4 CE. Most scholars put his death in Rome in the year 62 or 64.

In his childhood and youth, Paul learned a trade, how to “work with [his] own hands” (1 Cor. 4:12; cf. 9:6). As an apostle, he often continued to work at his trade, as these passages show. According to Acts, his trade was tentmaking, which presumably meant that he could do various kinds of work with leather.² Such an occupation makes very good sense and helps to explain important aspects of his apostleship (see chap. 4). Since he could do work that requires not only dexterity but also a lot of practice, it is doubtful that he was from a wealthy family.

His letters show that he had total command of the text of the Jewish Scripture in Greek translation. This means that he had studied it from an early age (pp. 17–18; 22–28).

His Greek (except for a few lapses) is good *koinē* (common) Greek, grammatically and syntactically sound. It is not the elegant literary Greek of his wealthy Jewish contemporary, Philo of Alexandria, and this too argues against the view that Paul was from a rich family. Additionally, he found it worthy of comment that he sometimes worked with his own hands, which is adequate proof that he was not a common laborer. Moreover, he knew how to dictate; he could if need be write with his own hand in large letters (Gal. 6:11), though not in the small, neat letters of the professional scribe. In the ancient world, reading was learned by reading aloud in school, and learning to write was a separate process, unconnected with reading, and involving various technical skills with knife, pen, ink, and

2. In the ancient world cotton was rare and very expensive, and so canvas was not available. Animal hides were plentiful.

papyrus.³ Being able to write quickly and neatly, in small letters, was a specialized skill (see further pp. 169–71).

Paul also had a high level of organizational ability. Guessing wildly, we might suppose that his father owned a small business and that Paul knew how to do the work, but that he had also been equipped with managerial skills, such as ordering materials and supervising employees.

During approximately the first half of his adulthood, Paul was a Pharisee. Very little is known about Paul the Pharisee (except that he was, on his own report, outstanding, Gal. 1:14), but we have enough information about Pharisaism to allow us to examine this topic more fully (pp. 28–54).

The only activity that can be ascribed to the first part of Paul's adult life with certainty is that he persecuted Jews who had accepted Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah and Son of God, having been convinced by the former disciples of Jesus (pp. 76–81).

Paul's autobiographical statements in Galatians 1 and Philippians 3, which we shall study in detail (pp. 22–27; chap. 3) indicate that he had a vision that transformed his life. It is probable that this vision occurred in the 30s of the first century, presumably when he was in his thirties. By this date, and for the rest of his life, he appears to us as a full-time religious zealot, first as a persecutor of Christianity, next as an apostle on its behalf. We shall see that his career as a persecutor depended on his individual zeal, not on his Pharisaism (pp 32–33; 78–81).

The revelatory experience that changed his life seems not to have altered his character and personality. He was full of zeal and gave his life to his cause—even when the cause changed.

3. For detailed information about writing materials, see Hans-Josef Klauck, *Ancient Letters and the New Testament: A Guide to Context and Exegesis* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006), chap. 2.

There are some uncertainties about just what the experience was, but in this Overview we leave them aside. Either on the road to Damascus (so Acts), or in Damascus (the inference from Gal. 1:15–16), God revealed Christ to him and called him to be an apostle to the gentiles (chap. 4).

His visionary experience convinced him that the followers of Jesus were right: Jesus had been raised; he was “Son of God,” “Lord,” and “Christ” (“Messiah” in Hebrew). He would soon return, and he would save those who put their faith in him.

During the next twenty years or so, Paul worked his way west from Syria to Greece, establishing congregations in several cities in Asia Minor and in at least three cities in eastern Europe—two in Macedonia and one in Greece. His westward progression was occasionally interrupted by the need to visit Jerusalem and Antioch (in Syria) and to revisit former churches. We shall see that there was a lot of traffic between Paul and his churches (chap. 5), and that he sometimes made two or three brief visits after his founding visit (the chapters on the Corinthian correspondence and Philippians).

One of his efforts during the last years of his itinerant apostleship was to take up a collection for the Christian community in Jerusalem. In approximately the year 53 or 54, he traveled to Jerusalem, with some companions, and delivered the collection. While there, he was arrested and charged with taking a gentile into the temple, which was forbidden. After a series of trials in Caesarea, on the coast of Palestine,⁴ he was finally sent to Rome to be tried by the emperor. We lose sight of him after his arrival in Rome. When the book of Acts ends, Paul is still in prison in Rome. It is probable that he was executed there in 62 or 64 CE, though it is conceivable that he was released and lived for several more years.

4. On the use of the word “Palestine,” see immediately below.

Both opinions can appeal to *1 Clement*, a letter from the bishop of Rome to the Corinthian church in about the year 96. Clement wrote this:

[S]even times he wore fetters, he was exiled, he was stoned, he was a herald both in the east and in the west, he gained the noble renown of his faith, he taught righteousness throughout the whole world and, having reached the limit [*terma*] of the West, he bore testimony before the rulers, and so departed from the world and was taken up into the holy place—the greatest example of endurance. (1 Clem. 5:1-7)

The phrase “*terma* of the West,” if taken to mean “physical limit,” inclines the reader to think that Paul reached Spain. If it means “goal of the West,” in the sense of “Paul’s fixed destination” or “the obvious goal of any traveler from east to west,” then Rome will do very well. The reference to “testimony before rulers” could refer to those of Rome, though the governors of the Roman provinces in Asia Minor and Greece, or even the local magistrates in various cities, would do just as well (chap. 21).

The implication of Acts is that Paul was in Rome for only two years. Counting from his second trial in Caesarea (Acts 24–26), and allowing for the journey to Rome, some put his death in the year 62. It is often supposed, however, that both he and Peter died in the first Roman persecution of Christians. Rome suffered a major fire in July of 64. Though Nero had been away, rumor fastened the blame for the fire on him. He needed a scapegoat, and he settled on followers of the new “superstition”—the movement that came to be called Christianity. This is the description of Tacitus, a Roman historian:

Their execution was made a matter of sport: some were sewn up in the skins of wild beasts and savaged to death by dogs; others were fastened to crosses as living torches, to serve as lights when daylight failed. Nero made his gardens available for the show and held games

in the Circus, mingling with the crowd or standing in his chariot in charioteer's uniform. (*Annals* 44.3–8)

If Paul did so end his days, the hideous suffering would not have surprised him. We shall note as one of the abiding themes of his letters that he expected Christians—and especially apostles—to suffer and thus become, in that way, too, one with their Lord (1 Thess. 2:1–2, 14–15; 2 Cor. 1:3–7; and elsewhere). And he believed that he and others would be “fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him” (Rom. 8:17). Throughout his career he saw himself as being always “given up to death for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor. 4:11), but suffering—and, no doubt, death itself—he met with this confidence:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life . . . nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:35–39)⁵

Paul’s long-term influence was so enormous that many have considered him to be a kind of second “founder” of Christianity. In his own day he was certainly a major figure within the very small Christian movement. On the other hand, he also had enemies and detractors, and his contemporaries probably did not accord him as much respect as they gave Peter and James (see “The Church in Jerusalem,” chap. 4). In studying Galatians, Romans, and the Corinthian correspondence, we shall see that Paul felt compelled to fight for his own worth and authority.

The major theological battle of his career was whether or not gentiles (non-Jews) who accepted Jesus must also become Jewish by

5. This section is copied from E. P. Sanders, *Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 16–17.

being circumcised and accepting other parts of the Jewish law that separated Jew from gentile. Paul argued vociferously that his converts could remain gentiles, though they had to accept Jewish monotheism and most aspects of Jewish ethics. In the long run, his position prevailed: Christianity became a religion separate from Judaism and dominated by gentiles, though the gentiles accepted some aspects of Judaism. It is not clear that Paul won the argument at the time, nor can we say that he was the main person whose work led to the substantial “gentilization” of Christianity. The outcome was the result of many more factors than Paul’s own direct work and arguments.

Two Controversial Terms: “Christianity” and “Palestine”

In what follows I shall routinely use two words to which some people object, for quite different reasons.

The first is “Christianity,” which appears early and often in the following pages. Many scholars have emphasized that the word *Christian* does not appear often in the New Testament. According to Acts 11:26, “it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called ‘Christian.’” In Acts 26:28, Agrippa asks Paul, “Are you so quickly persuading me to become Christian?” “Christian” otherwise appears only in 1 Pet. 4:16. In Acts 24:14, Paul uses “the Way” to designate the sect. Acts 9:2 mentions belonging “to the Way,” and the term occurs elsewhere (e.g., 8:25, 26; 19:23; 22:4; 24:14; 24:22). This has made many scholars reluctant to use “Christian” and “Christianity” to designate members of the church in its early days, preferring “the Way” or “the Jesus movement.”

Turning to Paul’s own usage, we note that Paul often calls the group “the congregation” (*ekklēsia*), a word that occurs alone and in a variety of phrases, such as “the congregations of God” (1 Thess. 2:14; 1 Cor. 10:32; 11:16). This word is usually translated “church,” and I

often use the word *church*, but “congregation” is a better translation. The word *church* to us now means a building used for Christian worship, but Paul’s “churches” were really only “congregations” of people who met wherever they could, presumably in someone’s house.

In 1 Thessalonians, he also calls his group “those who believe” (1:7; 2:10, 13; also Rom. 1:16).

He often, however, designates his group by a phrase that includes the word *Christ*, such as those who are “called of Jesus Christ” (Rom. 1:6); those who are “baptized into Christ Jesus” (Rom. 6:3); those in whom Christ dwells (Rom. 8:10); “joint heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17); “one body in Christ” (Rom. 12:5); “the body of Christ” (1 Cor. 12:27); those who are “sanctified in Christ” (1 Cor. 1:2); “members of Christ” (1 Cor. 6:15); those who are “Christ’s” (2 Cor. 10:7; Gal. 3:29); those who are “in Christ” (Gal. 3:27, 28); and “the saints in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:1). The “dead in Christ” have a special status when the Lord returns (1 Thess. 4:16).

In light of Paul’s own usage, I see no reason to avoid the use of the term “Christian” when discussing his converts. In this book, I use several of Paul’s own terms, but I unhesitatingly use the term “Christians” for people who belong to Christ.⁶ For the sake of convenience, I also refer to the early followers of Jesus (e.g., Peter and John), who started the “Jesus movement,” as “Christians.” They all held that Jesus was the Christ, and I think that they deserve the title, though they themselves probably did not use it.

The second word is “Palestine,” the use of which sometimes produces bitter denunciations. Apparently the thought is that calling the region “Palestine” means that “the Palestinians” have sole rights to the land now controlled by the state of Israel. Someone even started

6. See E. P. Sanders, “Paul’s Jewishness,” in *Paul’s Jewish Matrix*, ed. Thomas G. Casey and Justin Taylor (Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2011), 64–65.

the rumor that the name was never used before Hadrian, early in the second century CE, who used it pejoratively.

In fact, the word *Palestine* has been used to refer to this region at least since Herodotus (fifth century BCE): “The Phoenicians and the Syrians of Palestine” practiced circumcision (Book II §106). Texts could be cited from a long list of ancient writers after Herodotus, beginning with Aristotle. Since Palestine is geographically a specific part of Syria, it was often called “Syrian Palestine,” as it was by Josephus (*Antiq.* 8.263 and about fourteen more times). Moreover, major works by modern Jewish scholars refer to the region as “Palestine,” as does Saul Lieberman in *Greek in Jewish Palestine*.

I use “Palestine” to indicate the geographical region and “Jewish Palestine” to indicate the parts of the geographical area that were occupied largely by Jews in the days of Jesus and Paul. These terms are historical and have no reference to the modern world.

Paul Before His Call to Be an Apostle

The Acts of the Apostles: General Description

We shall now examine Paul's life before his conversion in greater detail. We start with general comments on the book of the Acts of the Apostles, one of the sources of information about Paul, both before and after his conversion; the other source is Paul's surviving letters. Acts is the second half of a two-volume work now often called "Luke-Acts." After writing the Gospel of Luke, the author (conventionally called "Luke") wrote Acts to complete his story of early Christianity. Luke's account of Paul and his mission occupies about half of Acts. Luke introduces "Saul" in Acts 7:58 as a man who approved of the persecution of the members of the Christian movement. Acts uses the name "Saul," which is a Hebrew name, until 13:9, after which it disappears. From that point on, the man is named "Paul," which is a Roman surname. Paul is the main focus of the rest of Acts.

Estimates of the date of composition of Acts vary widely. I believe

it to be safe to opt for composition sometime between 80 CE and the late 80s or the very early 90s. The primary consideration is that in the 90s of the first century there was an explosion of interest in Paul's letters (see chap. 6). I believe it likely that Acts provided part of the stimulus for the collection of the letters. The author never mentions Paul as a letter writer, but his work puts the spotlight on Paul. The other apostles fade after Paul begins his itinerant missionary activity (Acts 13:4).

If this hypothesis is reasonable, it means that we owe an enormous debt to the author of Acts. He helped inspire the gathering of material that has helped shape Christianity ever since.

Moreover, Acts gives a good overall view of Paul's travels, the cities he went to, his companions, and his conflicts with authorities. The work ranks as a good piece of **Hellenistic historiography**. More precisely, it is a good Hellenistic apologetic history and biography. "Apology" here means "defense against doubts and accusations." Paul had his detractors, and a lot of people distrusted or disliked the Christian movement. It was a threat to old ways that were tried and true. In response to possible criticism, both Luke and Acts present Christianity "as enlightened, harmless, even beneficent."¹

Luke describes some of the worthy characteristics of his hero, and he puts in Paul's mouth the things that the author feels that he should have said. This is a main characteristic of the writing of history in the ancient world, and it has characterized many biographies over the centuries—except modern critical works written by scholars who are scrupulous about evidence. I shall quote at some length what Thucydides, the greatest of the Greek historians, wrote on the subject:

1. Luke Timothy Johnson, "Luke-Acts," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 4:407.

As to the speeches that were made by different men . . . it has been difficult to recall with strict accuracy the words actually spoken, both for me . . . and for those who from various other sources have brought me reports. Therefore the speeches are given in the language in which, as it seemed to me, the several speakers would express . . . the sentiments most befitting the occasion. . . . (Book I.22)

The author of Acts was dependent on sources, and, as a good Hellenistic historian, he had his own views, to which he bent his account. Since the same author wrote the Gospel of Luke, we can study his use of his main source, Mark. (He also used either Matthew or a source that Matthew also had.) “Luke” revised Mark freely. Doubtless when writing Acts the author did not hesitate to revise his sources so that they presented the “correct” views of Paul. It is easy to spot some of the author’s preferences and tendencies, which led him to stress some points and downplay or omit others.

First, we note that Luke takes pains to show that there is no conflict between Christianity and the Roman Empire. In the trial scene in the Gospel (Luke 23:4–16), Pilate states that he finds no grounds for any accusation against Jesus (Luke 23:4). Later, after sending Jesus to be examined by Herod Agrippa, Pilate states that Jesus is innocent of the charges against him (23:14), later adding, “Indeed he has done nothing to deserve death. I will therefore have him flogged and release him” (23:15–16). None of these declarations of Jesus’ innocence are in Mark; Luke added them to his source. Luke, of course, agrees with Matthew and Mark on the outcome of the trial: the crowd cries out for Jesus’ death, and so “Pilate gave his verdict that their demand should be granted” (23:24).

Did Luke describe the attitude of Roman officials toward Paul in the same way? The first case in which Paul comes before a Roman official is in Philippi. The mob persuades the magistrates to beat Paul and his companion, Silas. The next morning, however, the

magistrates order their release. Paul demands an apology, and the magistrates comply (Acts 16:20–40). This is the only occasion in Acts in which Paul is punished. The clear implication is that Paul was innocent in the sight of a Roman magistrate.

Later, in Corinth, “the Jews” bring Paul before Gallio, the governor of the province of Achaia. They charge that Paul is persuading people to worship God “in ways that are contrary to the law.” Before Paul can reply, Gallio rules that it is only a question of the Jewish law, and the Jews have to sort the issue out themselves. This accords with the right of Jews to determine their own internal affairs (p. 62–68; 80–81). Gallio dismisses the case (Acts 18:12–17), and thus Paul is again shown not to have offended against Roman law.

After Paul returns for the last time to Jerusalem, a group of “the Jews” join in a conspiracy to kill him (23:12). He escapes the assassination plot but nevertheless ends up before the governor, Felix, whom Luke depicts as enjoying conversing with Paul, while hoping for a bribe. Felix holds Paul in custody, though providing for his physical comfort, and never makes a formal decision (Acts 23:12–24, 27).

Paul is still in custody when Festus replaces Felix. When the Jews again bring charges against Paul, this time Paul appeals to Caesar, claiming his right as a Roman citizen to be tried before the emperor (25:10). Festus complies (25:12). Herod Agrippa II gives Paul a hearing. He and Festus agree that “this man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment.” Agrippa remarks to Festus, “This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar” (25:1–26, 32).²

Thus we see that the author of Acts emphasized that the new Christian movement was neither criminal nor dangerous to the *Pax*

2. In these accounts of the trials of Jesus and Paul, I am merely describing the agenda of the author of Acts. I am not attempting a historical assessment.

Romana. We also see that almost every time Paul got into trouble, “the Jews” caused it. We shall meet this view again in the chapter on Philippians.

Besides presenting the Christian movement as harmless and even beneficial, the author also wished to portray the early Christian movement as almost free of friction. For example, one would never know from reading Acts that at a meeting in Syrian Antioch Paul had severely rebuked Peter and charged that he was untrue to the gospel (see Gal. 2:1-14).

The only other general tendency that I shall mention here is that Acts is “Jerusalem-centric”; that is, everything important happens in Jerusalem. We see this tendency very clearly in the Gospel of Luke. For example, in Mark 14:28, Jesus tells his disciples that after he is raised he will go before them to Galilee. In Matthew’s story of the resurrection of Jesus, the angel who meets the two Marys at the tomb commands them to tell the disciples that Jesus is going ahead of them to Galilee, and they are to meet him there (Matt. 28:1-10). Accordingly, they flee from Jerusalem to Galilee. In Luke, the disciples never leave Jerusalem and its environs (Luke 24:13, 33, 52-53); in Acts, the risen Jesus tells the disciples *not to leave Jerusalem* (Acts 1:4), and the disciples obey. Thus Luke has emphatically revised his source.

It is therefore not surprising that in Luke’s story of Paul’s early years, everything except Paul’s conversion experience takes place in Jerusalem.

Paul’s Biography According to Acts

Paul’s Childhood, Youth, and Education

Luke wrote that, though Paul was born in Tarsus, in the southeastern corner of Asia Minor, he was brought up in Jerusalem from his

childhood and studied under **Gamaliel**, the great Pharisaic sage. The author has Paul say this of himself in a speech that he delivers in “Hebrew,” which probably here means “Aramaic” (Acts 22:3):³ “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city [Jerusalem] at the feet of Gamaliel, educated strictly according to our ancestral laws . . .” The word translated “brought up” (*anatethrammenos*) usually means brought up since childhood.⁴ Similarly Acts 26:4: “All the Jews know my way of life from my youth, a life spent from the beginning among my own people and in Jerusalem.”

The phrase “from the beginning” might lead to the view that the family moved to Jerusalem when Paul was a very young child. Whether that is the meaning or not, according to these passages Paul must have lived in Jerusalem at least from around the age of seven until he was about sixteen—the years when boys were educated.

Paul’s Persecution of Christians in Jerusalem⁵

Acts depicts Paul the persecutor as living in Jerusalem and persecuting the followers of Jesus there. (In these passages, Acts calls Paul “Saul,” but I shall use “Paul” throughout.) According to Acts 7:58, when Stephen (the first Christian martyr) was stoned, the witnesses against him laid their cloaks at the feet of a young man, Paul, while they threw stones. According to 8:1, Paul approved of the stoning, and in 8:3 we read that Paul was “ravaging the church by

3. Ancient writers did not nearly distinguish between “Hebrew” and the closely related “Aramaic” (which was often called Chaldean). Modern scholars have fixed the meanings of the two words. It appears that after the Babylonian Exile the Jews of Palestine usually spoke Aramaic instead of the Hebrew of the Bible, and so references to the Hebrew language in Paul’s day are usually taken to mean Aramaic. On the names of the languages, see further below, p. 25.

4. So Josephus, *Antiq.* 2.232, and Acts 7:20, both referring to Moses as an infant and child.

5. The reasons for which non-Christian Jews would persecute Christian Jews (as Paul did) are discussed most fully below, pp. 76–81; 190–207.

entering house after house; dragging off both men and women, he committed them to prison.”

Later, he was still “breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord.” He “went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem” (Acts 9:1-2).

Paul’s Conversion Experience and its Aftermath

Letters from the high priest in hand, and on the way to Damascus, Paul saw a great light. A voice asked, “Why are you persecuting me?” When Paul asked in return “Who are you?” the voice replied, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.” Paul was then told to go to Damascus. He was temporarily blind and received help from Christians. They baptized him, and he immediately began proclaiming Christ in the synagogues of Damascus. “The Jews” plotted to kill him, but he escaped and made his way to Jerusalem (Acts 9:3-26).

I shall now pass over Paul’s adventures in Jerusalem, which occupy the rest of chapter 9, noting only the basic point that he was accepted by the disciples of Jesus. After chapter 9, Paul does not appear until 11:25, when we are told that Barnabas, a leading member of the Christian movement, went to Tarsus to bring Paul to Antioch. The Holy Spirit told the prophets and teachers in Antioch to set Paul and Barnabas apart for a special mission. This turned out to be a trip to Cyprus and some of the cities in southern Asia Minor to seek and win converts. Thus Paul is launched on his missionary journeys. We shall take up Paul’s apostolic career according to Acts later in our study.

All of the major aspects of Luke’s depiction of these early stages of Paul’s life are, to some degree or other, in conflict with our primary,

firsthand source, Paul's letters. What Paul wrote about himself offers some stark contradictions to the account in Acts.

Moreover, when we study the letters we shall find not a man highly educated in the Hebrew Bible and in Pharisaic law and traditions, but one completely at home among the Greek-speaking Jews of the western Diaspora (chap. 7, below).

Paul's Self-Description Compared with That of Acts

Direct Contradictions

In Galatians, Paul wrote an account of what he did after his conversion. In Acts, we recall, he preached in the synagogues in Damascus and then went to Jerusalem. This is what Paul himself tells us:

When God . . . was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but I went away at once into Arabia, and afterwards I returned to Damascus. (Gal. 1:15-17)

This sounds as if, when he was called, he was already persecuting in Damascus, and he was converted there. More importantly, he did not go to Jerusalem to confer with the other apostles, which directly contradicts the story in Acts.

Paul continues, "Then after three years I did go up to Jerusalem to visit **Cephas** [Peter]⁶ and stayed with him fifteen days; but I did not see any other apostle except James the Lord's brother. In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!" (Gal. 1:18-2).

Thus Galatians directly contradicts the view of Acts, that Paul was well-known as a persecutor of the first Christians in Jerusalem, as well

6. On "Cephas" and "Peter," see pp. 83-84.

as the view that after his conversion experience he went to Jerusalem and associated with the disciples of Jesus.

To continue with Paul's own testimony: "Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, and I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea that are in Christ," though they had heard that "the one who formerly was persecuting us is now proclaiming the faith he once tried to destroy" (Gal. 1:21-23). This is totally different from the account of the beginning of Paul's career in Acts.

Since the primary evidence for Paul is his own letters, we must reject most of the material about Paul in Acts 1-9. It is true that he was a persecutor, but not in Jerusalem. It is true that there was a connection between Paul's conversion and Damascus; it is true that he went to Cilicia; but the other information about Paul in the early chapters of Acts is inaccurate, according to Paul's sworn testimony ("before God!").

The account in Acts is based on the author's Jerusalem-centric view of early Christianity. The contradictions regarding where Paul did his persecuting and his early association with the leading members of the Christian movement incline me to doubt the other claims in Acts about Paul and Jerusalem—such as his lifelong residence there and his education under Gamaliel.

At this point in our evaluation of Acts' account of the early years of Paul's life, we do not need to say any more about the two points where Paul himself flatly contradicts Acts: (1) where the adult Paul persecuted Jews who accepted Christ; (2) what Paul did after his conversion. Later in this chapter I shall offer an account of Paul as persecutor. We have already seen what he did after his conversion (he went to Arabia: Gal. 1:17). This will occupy us early in the next chapter.

Childhood, Youth, and Education: Was Paul a Palestinian Pharisee?

Here, however, we need to explore the two points of Paul's biography in Acts that I doubt but that Paul does not directly contradict: that he was brought up in Jerusalem and that he studied under Gamaliel.

This is a vitally important issue. To understand Paul we must see that he was a Diaspora Jew and that he was not a Pharisaic scholar—a scholar, yes, but not one who shows specifically Pharisaic concerns and interests. In the course of this book we shall see that the letters present him as a man of the Greek-speaking Diaspora.

There is, however, some information in Paul's letters that can be viewed as supporting the view of Acts that Paul was brought up and educated in a Pharisaic school in Jerusalem. One point is that he writes that he was a "Hebrew of Hebrews"; the second is that he states that "as to the law" he was a Pharisee. To put these in context, I shall quote most of his autobiographical statements other than Gal. 2:1-14, which we have already considered:

1. If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. (Phil. 3:4b-6)
2. You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it. I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors. (Gal. 1:13-14)
3. Are they [Paul's opponents in Corinth] Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am

I. Are they ministers of Christ? I am talking like a madman—I am a better one. (2 Cor. 11:22-23)

4. I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. (Rom. 11:1)

The following table gives the key words of these passages that refer to Paul's pre-Christian life:

A <u>Phil. 3:4b-6</u>	B <u>Gal. 1:13-14</u>	C <u>2 Cor. 11:22-23</u>	D <u>Rom. 11:1</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • circumcised on the eighth day • Israelite • Benjaminite • Hebrew of Hebrews • Pharisee • persecutor • legally blameless 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jewish • persecutor • expert; leader (?) • zealous for "traditions" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hebrew • Israelite • son of Abraham 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Israelite • son of Abraham • Benjaminite

It appears to me that many terms in these lists are identical—more or less synonyms. In list C (2 Cor. 11), for example, one cannot distinguish Hebrew from Israelite from descendant of Abraham. The point of the repetition is presumably rhetorical: it emphasizes that Paul was a Jew and came from a family that carefully observed the Jewish law. On this reading, Paul's statement that he was from the tribe of Benjamin is a further specification: this was one of the three tribes that survived after the Assyrians dispersed the northern tribes. (The other two surviving tribes were Judah and Levi.) Paul's knowing that he was a Benjaminite probably points, again, to a pious and observant family.

"Circumcised on the eighth day," besides meaning "Jewish," also

indicates that his parents observed the commandment in Gen. 17:12. We can be sure that Jewish parents in the Diaspora had their sons circumcised, but we do not know how careful they were to have it done on the eighth day. Thus we do not know whether or not Paul's parents were unusually scrupulous to obey the law.

Three of the statements that Paul makes about himself are relevant to the discussion of his supposed education in a Pharisaic school in Jerusalem: "a Hebrew of the Hebrews," "as to the law, a Pharisee," "far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors." We shall take up the main phrases one-by-one: "Hebrew," "Pharisee," and "traditions of the ancestors."

A Hebrew Born of Hebrews

Many scholars have interpreted "Hebrew" in lists A and C as offering major support in favor of Acts' account of Paul's childhood and youth. This has surface plausibility, but I believe it to be incorrect. As we shall see, Paul, a student of the Pharisees from childhood up, fluent in Aramaic and Hebrew, studying the Bible in Hebrew and learning dozens of Pharisaic legal traditions and opinions, is not the Paul of the letters, who had precise and complete knowledge of the Bible in Greek, who shared the opinion of other Greek-speaking Jews on ethical issues when they differ from Palestinian sources, and who never mentions any opinion that was held only by Pharisees.

In view of the weight of scholarship that holds that Acts is always right, no matter what the evidence of the letters indicates, I shall, however, consider this in detail, beginning with a brief summary of the arguments of two of the foremost scholars who have leaned on "a Hebrew born of Hebrews" in order to support Acts.

According to J. B. Lightfoot, by "Hebrew of Hebrews" Paul meant to exclude the possibility that his forebears, though they lived in the Diaspora, had "adopted the language and conformed to the customs

of the people around them . . . There had been no Hellenist among them; they were all strict Hebrews from first to last.”⁷

Martin Hengel, citing Lightfoot’s view, stated decisively that “Neither in II Cor. 11.22 [list C] nor in Phil. 3.5 [list A] can Hebrew mean anything other than someone speaking *Hebraisti*, i.e. a Palestinian Jew speaking the sacred language or Aramaic, or a Diaspora Jew, who in origin and education had extremely close connections with the mother country and who therefore also understood Hebrew.”⁸ (On Aramaic and Hebrew, see n. 3 above.)

Before commenting on the views of Lightfoot and Hengel, I should explain that to our ear the identity between people called “Hebrews” and those who spoke the Hebrew language sounds more obvious than it is—Englishmen are naturally thought to speak English; a “German born of Germans” can be expected to speak German. But in fact the Hebrew language (as we call it) was not often called “Hebrew” (*Hebraisti* in Greek), as it is in the passages cited by Hengel,⁹ but rather had other designations. In the Bible, which is more relevant to Paul’s usage, and which we know him to have read (unlike the sources quoted by Hengel), the Jewish language is called “Judean” (Hebrew *Yehûdî*: Isa. 36:11; 2 Kgs. 18:26; Neh. 13:24; 2 Chron. 32:18). In the LXX (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible) *Yehûdî* is translated *Ioudaisti*, “Judean” or even “Jewish.” Thus LXX 4 Kings (=2 Kings in the Hebrew Bible) 18:26: “Speak with us in the Syrian language [Aramaic], for we understand it, and not in the Judean language [*Ioudaisti*].”

Moreover, the Hebrew language was sometimes called “Chaldean” rather than “Hebrew.” According to Philo, when Ptolemy

7. J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians* (London: Macmillan, 1868), 144.

8. Martin Hengel, *The Pre-Christian Paul* (London: SCM, 1991), 25.

9. In note 146 Hengel correctly cites Ben Sira and 4 Maccabees for the use of a word related to “Hebrew” to indicate the Jewish language. In 4 Maccabees 12:7 and 16:15, for example, we find the phrase *en tē Hebraïdi phōnē*, “in the Hebrew language.”

Philadelphus decided to add a Greek translation of Hebrew Scripture to his library, he asked the high priest in Jerusalem to send scholars who could translate “the Chaldean” of the Bible (*Chaldaikēn*) into Greek (Philo, *Moses* 2.31). We now call the language of the Chaldeans “Aramaic.”

The point is that although the word *Hebrew* in modern languages almost automatically makes one think of the Hebrew language, that was not necessarily the case for Paul. In “Hebrew born of Hebrews,” Paul was making a claim about his lineage, not about his own first language or that of his relatives and ancestors.

Lightfoot did not lean at all on a theory about the name of the language of ancient Israel, and Hengel had another arrow in his quiver. The point about the name of the language does not defeat their case, which is broader. Lightfoot’s principal argument, endorsed by Hengel, was that in list A (Phil. 3) the terms that appear to be synonyms are arranged in the order of greater specificity, each with its own definition, and each excluding a specific possibility. “Circumcised on the eighth day” excludes the possibility that Paul’s parents were heathen or Ishmaelite; “of the people of Israel” proves that they were not proselytes; “of the tribe of Benjamin” means that they did not belong to a “renegade tribe”; “Hebrew of Hebrews,” as we noted above, means that they had adopted neither Greek customs nor the Greek language.¹⁰

I believe that this is **over-exegesis**: Lightfoot wanted to turn Paul’s list of his Jewish credentials into a precise description of details, some of which are dubious. What, for example, was a “renegade tribe”? Since Paul was fluent in Greek, is it really certain that no member of his family spoke Greek?

Hengel, besides accepting the argument of greater specificity

10. Lightfoot, *Philippians*, 144.

(though not Lightfoot's detailed definitions of each term), adds another argument: Paul was a *strict* Jew and came from a strict family, and every strict Jew thought that the "only proper place for *strict* Jews . . . to study the Torah" was Jerusalem. In particular, that was the only place for him to become a Pharisaic scholar.¹¹ The necessity for Paul to have studied in Jerusalem supports the view that in calling himself a Hebrew he meant to say that he knew Hebrew or Aramaic or both, and this in turn supports the description in Acts of Paul's having been brought up in a Pharisaic school in Palestine.

The idea that strict Jews felt that they had to study in Jerusalem, however, is even less credible than Lightfoot's view that Paul's relatives did not speak Greek. The **Diaspora** was full of Jews who regarded themselves as perfectly loyal, expert in the Scriptures, and strictly obedient to the Jewish law. In Alexandria, the Greek translation of Jewish Scripture was regarded as inspired and correct in all respects, and the LXX was often regarded as better than the Hebrew original. It is more than difficult to argue that Philo thought that something was lacking in his strictness because he had not studied in Jerusalem. Hengel's assertion that in order to be a "strict" Jew one had to study in Jerusalem is without merit. The phrase "a Hebrew born of Hebrews" does not prove that Paul was educated in Jerusalem.

It is almost impossible to prove a negative. I have no evidence on the basis of which to say that Paul never studied in Jerusalem, much less that he could not speak Aramaic and read the Hebrew Scripture. He could have been bilingual—and would have been if his parents spoke Aramaic at home. He was highly intelligent, he worked hard as a student and adult, his mind was capacious. It is humanly possible to know several languages and to know the contents of the Bible in more than one language: lots of Jews have done and can do these

11. Hengel, *Pre-Christian Paul*, 27.

things, and I am sure that Paul had the ability. I do not think that the arguments in favor of Paul's being reared in Jerusalem are persuasive, but I am happy to leave open the possibility that Paul knew one or both of the Semitic languages of his people (Hebrew and Aramaic) and that he had spent some time in Jerusalem.

What I doubt is that his entire education was in Jerusalem and that he was a Palestinian Pharisee, taught by Gamaliel. The only real evidence for this view is the description in Acts, which is dependent on Luke's Jerusalem-centric view, some parts of which contradict Paul's own sworn statements. Later in this chapter we shall see that a different view of his education is more likely.

As to the Law, a Pharisee

The Pharisees in Palestine: Overview

I wish now, however, to describe the sorts of things that Paul would have learned had he been educated in a Pharisaic school in Jerusalem. This is one of the two instances in which I put in the main text of this book a lengthy discussion that is important for understanding an aspect of the ancient world but that is not directly relevant to an understanding of Paul. The Palestinian Pharisees in the time of Jesus and Paul have been so grossly maligned, partially out of sheer ignorance, that I want to explain what they were "all about," as we now say. This will be partly relevant to the question of Paul's upbringing and education; it will add some weight to the argument against Luke's view that Paul was educated as a Palestinian Pharisee. The main point, however, is to give background information about Judaism in Paul's day.

Our information about the Pharisees comes from three principal sources: **Josephus**, the New Testament, and early rabbinic literature, a large and difficult body of literature that, with patience, can yield

some conclusions about Pharisaic practice and belief. The rabbis were the intellectual heirs of the Pharisees; they flourished after the great Jewish revolt against Rome, which ended in 70 CE.

We may derive indirect information from the **Dead Sea Scrolls**, a large body of documents found at Qumran near the shore of the Dead Sea, which come from an isolated Jewish group, and which can be dated approximately from 150 BCE to 66 CE. Many scholars identify the sect that produced the Scrolls as a group of Essenes.

We begin with a brief historical sketch of the Pharisees.¹² They constituted a party that arose within Palestinian Judaism in the course of the second century BCE. The other principal Jewish parties were the Essenes and the Sadducees. All the parties were quite small; Josephus offers us the figures six thousand for the Pharisees and four thousand for the Essenes, and he also states that there were only a few Sadducees.¹³ Taken all together the parties constituted a small percentage of the population. These ancient parties were not at all like political parties in modern democracies. The population was not distributed among the parties; the parties did not sponsor candidates for office; there were in fact no elections. The parties, rather, allowed Jews with intense interest in the law and special views with regard to its interpretation to band together with others of like mind.

Whether one or another of the parties influenced political decision-making rested entirely with the person in power. We know that one of the early **Hasmonean priest-kings**, Hyrcanus I (135–104 BCE), rejected the Pharisees and allied himself with the Sadducees. It is highly probable that his successor, Alexander Jannaeus

12. Chapter 18 of E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief* (London: SCM, 1992) gives a history of the party. Chapter 19 deals with theology and practice.

13. Josephus, *Antiq.* 17.42 (6,000 Pharisees); Philo, *Every Good Man is Free* (75); and Josephus, *Antiq.* 18.20 (4,000 Essenes); *Antiq.* 13.298 (the Sadducees have “the confidence of the wealthy alone”); *Antiq.* 18.17 (“there are but few men to whom [the Sadducean] doctrine has been made known”).

(103–76 BCE), not only rejected but also persecuted the Pharisees. But the next monarch, Salome Alexandra (76–67 BCE), turned her government partly over to the Pharisees. When **Herod the Great** became king of Judea, he at first found the Pharisees to be allies, but later he became their enemy. After Herod, the Pharisees were active in a revolt against his son Archelaus in 6 CE. After that, they drop out of Josephus's history until the outbreak of the Jewish revolt against Rome 60 years later, in 66 CE, which at first they tried to prevent, but in which they soon assumed an active part.¹⁴

Since the Pharisees disappear from Josephus's history for the sixty years that include Paul's youth and adulthood, we do not know what their *political* allegiances were during this period. In Galilee they may or may not have supported Herod Antipas, the tetrarch; in Judea they probably at first welcomed the dismissal of Herod Archelaus, and possibly they welcomed the direct Roman takeover. On the other hand, they may not have supported the high priests whom the Romans installed as the *de facto* rulers of Jerusalem under the prefects and procurators. If Paul had been a Palestinian Pharisee, he would have had opinions on these issues, but we hear nothing about these matters at all.

We now turn to the *internal characteristics of Pharisaism*.

Study of rabbinic literature and the Dead Sea Scrolls reveals that the Jewish parties differed from one another both in practice and theology, but that the major differences were legal and concerned religious *practice*. The parties were not defined by slightly varying theological opinions, but rather by legal opinions that bore on religious activities such as sacrifice in the temple, observance of the Sabbath, and purification.

Some *general characteristics* emerge quite clearly: (1) the Pharisees

14. For this history, see Sanders, *Practice and Belief*, chap. 18.

believed in some form of afterlife; (2) they combined belief in free will and divine determination; (3) they were legal experts who had partially distinctive opinions about various issues; (4) they accepted “traditions of the elders,” that is, non-biblical traditions. (5) They were lenient in judgment, whereas the Sadducees were harsh. This list is basically derived from Josephus, but it is supported by early rabbinic literature. Our detailed information about the distinctive legal views of the Pharisees comes from the latter source.

We shall begin with points (3) and (4), saving their theological beliefs (1) and (2) for later. Point 5, lenience in judgment, I shall discuss below in connection with Paul’s zeal (pp. 76–81).

I shall now give one example of a legal topic that divided the parties—or, more precisely, that was a factor in the separation of the Dead Sea group (probably Essenes) from the rest of Judaism: the *calendar*.

The Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the great majority of Jews observed a “luni-solar” calendar; it was basically a lunar calendar, but it had to be adjusted to the solar or seasonal year. A purely lunar year is 354 days long—11.25 days shorter than a solar year. In such a calendar the months and weeks back up: each comes about eleven days earlier than it did the previous year. The Jews had seasonal festivals and holy days—for example Passover, which must come in the spring. Moreover, the Bible requires Passover to take place on a specific month and day: Nisan 14. But in a strictly lunar calendar that day would come earlier every year and usually would not be in the spring. The problem was solved by the occasional insertion of a thirteenth month.

In this calendar, as in the modern western calendar, the days of the month do not always fall on the same days of the week. Passover sometimes falls on the Sabbath.

This was the common Jewish calendar in the first century, and

it remains the Jewish calendar. One group, however—the group responsible for the Dead Sea Scrolls—found this to be a flawed system. This group held that on the Sabbath only the specific Sabbath sacrifices (Num. 28:9–10) could be offered in the temple. Since the high priest followed the common luni-solar calendar and offered the Passover sacrifices when Passover fell on the Sabbath, the Dead Sea sectarians regarded the sacrifices as invalid. They broke away from the temple, renounced the authority of the high priest, and observed their own calendar, in which Passover never came on the Sabbath.

This is the sort of legal, practical question that divided the Jewish parties. The Pharisees, the Sadducees, many of the Essenes, the priests, and most people agreed on enough points that Jewish life in Palestine actually functioned. In the end, Passover took place when the high priest decreed, and the parties could only go along with him or break off and live by themselves, and some sectarians chose this option. They could also, of course, try to influence him.

I hope that this example conveys some idea of Jewish parties and sects. With the exception of the resurrection, which the Sadducees denied, the parties had no significant differences in philosophical theology, but they did differ on how best to obey the law. They were all committed to obeying the law as they saw it.

The Pharisees as Legal Experts

Many Christians, including especially New Testament scholars, think of the Pharisees in two ways: (1) they were somewhat weird zealots, who were obsessively concerned with trivia; (2) they somehow had gained the ability to make all other Jews follow their trivial pursuits. Both points are completely wrong. Ancient debates about religious or legal matters sound a little strange to modern people: why did they argue about *that*? But the day of the Passover sacrifices is very

important: let someone today propose moving the date of Easter or Christmas, and the point will quickly be seen.

Holy days are holy because God said so; and if he inspired a biblical author to write “Nisan 14” as the day of Passover (as in Neh. 2:1) he presumably cared about the date.¹⁵ So should we not try to find out precisely when Nisan 14 comes each year? And should we not know precisely what we are to do on that day? The Jewish law and its detailed interpretation will be called “trivial” only by people who think that religious practice is trivial, or who are unable to translate the ancient Jewish concern to do precisely what God said into a modern religious context.

Nor is it the case that the Pharisees were obsessively zealous. They were zealous, as were most Jews. But the Dead Sea sect far exceeded the Pharisees in religious zeal. During the Jewish revolt against Rome, other groups would exceed the Pharisees in national zeal. The Pharisees were just one group among others who cared for the will of God. Both Josephus and Luke describe them by using the word *precise*.¹⁶ It is odd to me that the greatest opponents of the ancient Pharisees have been modern New Testament scholars who spent their lives, as did the Pharisees, trying to understand the Bible precisely.

From this review, it appears that Pharisees had views about the law and how it should be administered within Jewish Palestine: that is, they had views on more or less all of the issues of the day. Moreover,

15. Leviticus puts the date of the Passover sacrifice on the fourteenth of the first month (Lev. 23:5); cf. the provision of the fourteenth day of the second month for the second Passover (Num. 9:11). In Deut. 16:5, the first month is called “Abib.” The name “Nisan” for the first month of the festival year was adopted as a result of the Babylonian Exile. “Nisan” appears regularly in postexilic sources, such as Neh. 2:1, Esther 3:7, and rabbinic literature. Today people often call Nisan 15 “Passover,” since the meal comes after sunset and thus (by the Hebrew reckoning) the next day. Before the destruction of the temple in 70 CE, however, Passover was the day of the sacrifice, Nisan 14, and the day of the meal, the 15th, was technically “the first day of Unleavened Bread.” See Sanders, *Practice and Belief*, 132–38 and notes.

16. See Acts 26:5; cf. 22:3, where the NRSV translates the word “strict”; Josephus, *War* 2.162; cf. 1.108–9; *Life* 191. See A. I. Baumgarten, “The Name of the Pharisees,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 102 (1983): 411–28.

their legal expertise was acknowledged, often with respect, by non-Pharisees (see Josephus, *Life* 191-98).

The Pharisees and the early rabbis expressed their legal opinions in *halakah*, a word derived from the verb “to walk,” indicating the right path or the correct practice. Thus the plural, *halakôt*, meant “rules about behavior.” Although there were some rules that did not concern a specific biblical requirement, the main function of *halakah* was to show how each commandment could and should be obeyed.

The biblical law, to be followed, must be made precise; this requires interpretation. For example, the law prohibits work on the Sabbath. What counts as “work” and what does not? Cooking is prohibited because the Bible itself forbids making a fire, but what about carrying the dish or pot to the table? Removing the dishes after the meal? May people go for long walks? If so, how long? May one hitch the donkey to a cart and take a Sabbath afternoon drive? Or is that work?

Besides the Sabbath day, the Bible ordains “festival days,” which are semi-Sabbaths. There are six days a year, each one coming during a festival, that are to be treated like Sabbaths, except that the work involved in producing food for that day is permitted (Lev. 23; Exod. 12:16). Thus on a festival day one may take a dove from the dovecote, kill it, shovel dirt to cover the blood, pluck it, and cook it. But what about moving the ladder to the dovecote? Should one have done that the previous day? And what should one do if a festival day immediately precedes the Sabbath? One cannot prepare food on the Sabbath, and the only food that can be prepared on a festival day is for that day, not the next day. Should one fast? No, the Sabbath is not a fast.

Saying that people should live by the biblical law is easy. Figuring out how to do it is difficult. The Pharisees studied the Bible intensively and came up with rules about how to follow the

commandments. This gets them into what we regard as trivial detail—but the trivia is in the Bible. Should the Bible be ignored?

Was Paul a *legal* expert in the Palestinian sense? Had he learned how to state rules that show people how to walk in the ways of the Bible? To answer this question in the affirmative we would have to have a text in which he comments on a legal question relevant to Palestinian Judaism in his day. We have none. I shall consider two other examples, tithes and purity, both of which some scholars find to be relevant to Paul's conflict with the Jerusalem apostles, especially as it appears in Galatians.¹⁷

I should explain that these two topics, tithes and purity, do not have much to do with anything that Paul wrote. He never mentions tithing. He used purity language as a metaphor in discussing ethical or moral issues, but the only purity law that he discusses is the purity of foods in Rom. 14:1–6, where he does not discuss any foodstuff in particular. One can understand Paul perfectly well while luxuriating in total ignorance of purity laws. But unfortunately, New Testament scholars write about purity and the Pharisees in ways that misrepresent both topics. Here I want to continue to clarify not what Paul wrote but what ancient Jews thought and did. This will, I hope, help the reader understand a little about ancient religion and what it means to claim that Paul was a Palestinian Pharisee, educated by Gamaliel.

A *tithe* is a tenth, and in biblical law the “first tithe” refers to the required donation of one-tenth of most forms of agricultural produce to the two groups who staffed the temple, the Levites and the priests (e.g., Num. 18:21–32; Neh. 13:10–14).¹⁸ According to Deut. 26:12–15, another tithe (“second tithe”) also helped support

17. Below, pp. 35–37.

18. According to the passage in Numbers, people gave their tithes to the Levites, who in turn gave 10 percent to the priests.

“the aliens, the orphans, and the widows.” Tithes were to be paid only on produce grown in the land of Israel, and thus this whole topic of law was irrelevant in the Diaspora.¹⁹

Within Jewish Palestine, tithes (like taxes today) led to a lot of legal disputes. The biblical passages in Numbers 18 and Nehemiah 13 and elsewhere²⁰ very clearly require Jewish farmers to give tithes of produce (animals were taxed by a different law, that of the firstborn), and so the basic principle was not in question. But, still, a few uncertainties had to be cleared up.

One of the questions was, ten percent of what produce? Since the point of the system was to help feed the Levites, the priests, and the needy, clearly only food fit for humans should be tithed (not hay, etc.). But some produce may or may not be considered foodstuff. This is why Matt. 23:23 refers to the tithe of mint, dill, and cummin. These herbs flavor food; are they therefore food or not, to be tithed or not? It was not only the Pharisees who had views on such topics; on the contrary, everyone had views, or at least accepted the views of some body of experts, such as the priests or the Pharisees. All farmers had to know what to tithe, and the Pharisees’ opinions only sometimes governed peoples’ behavior. The priests had somewhat different views of tithing from those of the Pharisees, and it is certain that many people followed them instead of the Pharisees.²¹

If we found a text discussing tithing law in detail, we would know only that it was Palestinian, not that it was Pharisaic. Some details might reveal it to be Pharisaic. An example would be discussion of the problem of what to do if one acquired produce that may not have

19. E. P. Sanders, “Jewish Association with Gentiles and Galatians 2:11-14,” in *The Conversation Continues*, ed. Robert Fortna and Beverly Gaventa (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 170-88, 283-308.

20. Other passages include Gen. 1:20; 28:22; Lev. 27:30-33; Deut. 12:17-19; 14:22-29; 26:12-13.

21. Sanders, *Practice and Belief*, 147-50. For a little more detail about complications of tithing, see Sanders, *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah* (London: SCM, 1990), 43-48, 299-308 (which includes support from the Diaspora).

been tithed by the farmer: should the buyer tithe it just to be safe?²² Thus if we had a text in Paul on tithing produce that may not have been tithed by the producer, we would be inclined to accept the view of Acts, that he was brought up as a Palestinian Pharisee. In fact, of course, there are no texts in Paul's surviving letters on tithes. In their absence, should we nevertheless understand that his head was full of such learning? We continue our quest by turning to purity.

Purity is different from tithing in that some purity rules could be followed outside Palestine. The Bible, for example, regards some foods as impure (pork, shellfish, the flesh of carnivorous animals, rodents, etc.: Lev. 11; Deut. 14). Jews were famous throughout the ancient world for refusing to eat pork, which was otherwise a very popular meat. The biblical prohibition of certain foods could be observed anywhere, provided, of course, that alternative foods were available, and some alternative foods were almost always available.

Jewish purity laws also govern the defilement of individuals by those things that are part of human procreation, birth, and death: childbirth and menstruation render women impure; semen renders both men and women impure; other discharges from the genitals (resulting from, for example, miscarriage and gonorrhea) render those whom they contact impure; death renders impure everyone who touches a corpse or is in the same room with it (Lev. 12, 15; Num. 19). Unlike the prohibited foods, these impurities that arise from the human lifecycle are not *bad*. Jewish law requires people "to be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28), which means that men

22. The names of rabbis that appear in the Mishnaic tractate *Demai* (on produce that may not have been tithed) are second-century. I think it likely that rabbinic concern with tithing to support the Levites and priests greatly increased after the two revolts against Rome, when it became clear that the temple would not be rebuilt in the near future. The problem was that the Levites (and even the priests) might effectively disappear unless they continued to receive some support. First fruits were paid only in connection with the temple service, but tithes survived the destruction. It is, I suppose, even possible that the entire problem of produce that may or may not have been tithed is post-70, but for present purposes I am assuming that it is pre-70.

and women should come into contact with semen and that women should give birth to children. Care for the dead was a religious duty. Such conditions demonstrating human change, however, should be *kept away from the temple, the home of the unchanging God*. Therefore, Leviticus specifies bathing (and sometimes washing clothes and bedding) to remove these and other impurities *before entering the temple* (Lev. 15:31). The removal of most impurities required not only bathing but also the setting of the sun.

In the Hasmonean period (c. 140–40 BCE), Palestinian Jews began to take purificatory baths in a very special way: by walking down into a large pool of water, cut into bedrock. The use of these immersion pools (in Hebrew, *miqva'ot*) seems to have been common in first-century Palestine.²³ The Pharisees agreed that bathing to remove impurity meant immersing, but they wished to define suitable pools more *precisely*. Preferably a Pharisaic *miqveh* should be fed by a stream of running water (for example, from a nearby spring); the ideal was that water should never be drawn and carried to a *miqveh*. Most *miqva'ot*, however, could not be located below a spring, and so they were cut into the rock and rainwater was channeled into them. During the dry season, the water level might drop so badly that one could not immerse, so that it was necessary to add water from another source, such as a cistern, river, or lake. But since water for purification should not be drawn or carried, the new water had to be purified. To achieve this, a Pharisaic *miqveh* had a second pool dug beside it, which was connected by a pipe to the immersion pool. Drawn water could then be added to the *miqveh*; it was purified by opening the pipe, thus allowing the preserved pure water in the second pool to come into contact with, and thus purify, the new water. In Palestine, *everyone*

23. On immersion pools, see Sanders, *Jewish Law*, 403, index of subjects, *immersion*, *immersion pools*; Sanders, *Practice and Belief*, 222–29.

used *miqva'ot*, and the Pharisees were distinct only with regard to the *precise* definition of a suitable *miqveh*.

A strict reading of Leviticus would seem to require ritual bathing only before entering the temple. In Palestine, however, immersion pools have been found in very remote villages, such as Gamla in the Golan Heights. Thus it appears that first-century Palestinian Jews immersed even when they were not about to enter the temple.

Similarly, a strict reading of the Bible would mean that, except for avoiding forbidden food, there were very few purity laws outside of Palestine: what was forbidden was the introduction of impurity into the temple.²⁴ But the larger cultural environment dictated otherwise. Everyone in the ancient world followed at least some purity laws. Pagans dipped a hand in water before entering a temple; pagan priests washed their hands before sacrificing; in Greek cities the marketplace (*agora*) was sprinkled with lustral water, and sprinkling basins stood on tripods or pedestals at the boundaries of each market.²⁵ Prior to attending a religious festival, some Greeks bathed in a special pool or stream. Religious purifications, and the ideal of being pure, were standard in the ancient world. There was a widespread desire to distinguish the sacred from the profane, and this was achieved by purification. Pure people entered pure areas in order to participate in sacred rites.²⁶

Therefore many Jews living in the gentile cities around the Mediterranean also developed purity practices, even though biblical

24. Purity laws that were prohibitions could be observed anywhere, such as the prohibition of certain meats (Deut. 14; Lev. 11) or the prohibition of sexual intercourse during the woman's menstrual period (Lev. 18:19; 20:18).

25. There are a few examples in Sanders, *Jewish Law*, 262–64. See further René Ginouvès, *Balaneutikè. Recherches sur le bain dans l'antiquité grecque* (Paris: De Boccard, 1962); Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 75–79 and elsewhere. There are many parallels between Greek and Jewish views of purification, such as use of water from a spring, fountain, or the sea (78).

26. On purity and purification in Greek culture, see Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 75–87.

law was largely silent on the subject as it pertained to the Diaspora. Some Jews washed their hands before praying; some stood in the sea to pray. Many synagogues were beside rivers or bodies of water, possibly to facilitate purification, and some Diaspora Jews had more elaborate rules of purification.²⁷ I shall give one example of the latter: according to Philo, after sexual intercourse neither husband nor wife could touch anything until they “made use of water and [sprinkling from] basins” (*Spec. Laws* 3.63). This means that, even though Leviticus requires purification after contacting semen only if one wished to enter the temple, Philo (and, I assume, at least some other Diaspora Jews) altered and expanded the law so that it applied in the Diaspora.

It is to be noted that two of the means of purification just mentioned—handwashing and sprinkling from a basin—are not part of the biblical law, which always specifies *bathing*, but are typical of pagan practice. Some Jews in the Greek-speaking world acquired some religious practices from their neighbors.²⁸

If we have a text from the ancient world that mentions purity or purifications, or that uses purity language as a metaphor for moral rectitude (as in 2 Cor. 6:6; 7:11; 11:2; Phil. 1:17; 4:8),²⁹ we know only that it is an ancient text. Paul’s frequent use of purity language in a moral sense stamps him as ancient, not as Pharisaic. If a text mentions immersion, however, we could assume that it is Palestinian

27. Sanders, *Jewish Law*, 258–71.

28. I have frequently discussed purity laws. See *Jewish Law*, the subject index s.v. “Purity laws”; *Practice and Belief*, the subject index under “Purification.”

29. In these passages, Paul uses *hagnos*, “pure,” and cognate words in a favorable sense. Possibly 2 Cor. 11:3, where there is a variant reading, should be added. In addition, Paul uses *katharizein*, “to clean or purify,” in a favorable sense in 2 Cor. 7:1, and *akatharsia*, *akathartos*, “impurity,” “impure,” in a negative sense in Rom. 1:24; 6:19; 2 Cor. 12:21; Gal. 5:19; 1 Thess. 2:3; 4:7. English translations do not always translate the purity language literally. Thus, for example, the NRSV and NIV both have “sincerely” instead of “purely” at Phil. 1:17; at 2 Cor. 7:11, the NRSV has “guiltless” and the NIV “innocent” instead of “pure”; at Rom. 6:19 the JB has “vice” for “impurity.”

and Jewish. If it specifies that the water for immersion should not be drawn or carried, it is probable that the text is Pharisaic.

Many New Testament scholars, afflicted with severe myopia regarding purity and the Pharisees, regard any indication of a concern with purity to be Pharisaic, or at least as an indication that the people in question were “close to the Pharisees.”³⁰ I cannot imagine a sentence that more completely misrepresents purity in the ancient world. All ancient people had purity practices; the Bible has purity laws, ancient Jews generally followed the Bible, both the Bible and the wider society encouraged Jews to follow some sort of purity rules, and various Jews had various purity practices. Pharisees, like others, had views about purity, including especially specific definitions of proper immersion pools.

To conclude this topic: Paul wrote that “as to the law” he was a Pharisee. As Samuel Sandmel once remarked to me, we do not know what it meant for a Diaspora Jew—one living outside Palestine—to be a Pharisee. Most New Testament scholars assume that the only form of Pharisaism that could have existed was Palestinian Pharisaism. For this reason I have attempted to clarify what it might mean to be a *Palestinian* Pharisee in Paul’s day. New Testament scholars habitually write about Paul’s Pharisaism and sometimes about his education in Jerusalem without ever saying what this education would have covered. I have simply tried to explain a few Pharisaic topics and to set them in the larger context of concern with biblical law that typified Jews everywhere and the concern with purity that typified all of the ancient religious cultures in Paul’s world. If Paul studied under Gamaliel, he would have had a distinctively Pharisaic position on topics of Jewish law on which all Palestinian Jews had (or accepted) some position or other. He would have studied such topics as whether

30. Hengel, *Pre-Christian Paul*, 123 n. 174.

or not flavorings count as food, what to do if one acquired agricultural produce that may not have been tithed, and how water was supplied to immersion pools.

The second point of this discussion is to avoid the sloppy and inaccurate generalizations that often govern the question of Paul's Pharisaism, such as the idea that being a Pharisee made him obsessively concerned with purity and similar trivia. All ancient people (more or less) were interested in purity, and the Pharisees were distinctive only in a few specific issues.

We can by no means exclude the possibility that Paul had learned numerous Pharisaic positions on how laws should be applied in the land of Israel. No such learning is visible in the surviving letters, but this might mean no more than that the topics did not arise.

Our discussion of Pharisaism, and especially the Pharisaic *halakah* (pp. 34ff. above), leads to one point that counts against the possibility that Paul was educated as a Palestinian Pharisee and studied at the feet of Gamaliel. Paul seems not to have given his churches very many concrete details about how to live. He apparently did not formulate rules of behavior and practice (*halakôt*) and drill his converts in them. One of the reasons he wrote such interesting letters is that *later*, after he had left a new church, all sorts of specific issues arose, and his converts asked him questions. In answering them, he sometimes seems to be casting about in an effort to relate principles to practice (as we shall see when we study the Corinthian correspondence, especially food offered to idols). This is not what we would expect of a man who had been brought up in Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel.

Pharisaic Soteriology

In addition to the general charge that studying how to obey the commandments of the Hebrew Bible made the Pharisees focus on

trivia, the Protestant critics of ancient Judaism have accused ancient Jews in general and Pharisees in particular of holding the view that they could achieve salvation by these trivial acts of obedience to the law and by piling up “good deeds” or “good works.”

This supposed soteriology (doctrine of salvation) is usually termed “self-righteousness,” “works-righteousness,” “legalism,” or simply “self-salvation.” The supposed Pharisaic dogma is totally opposed to relying on the grace of God; all depends on each individual’s performance.³¹

I have two preliminary remarks, both of which have to do with the unusual nature of Christianity compared to other religions. The first concerns “dogma.” Over the centuries, Christianity became a religion that required its members to believe (or to say that they believed) a list of propositional truths—dogmas. In religious services they recited *creeds*, lists of dogmas. This conception of Christianity soon produced the possibility of heresy—believing things that were not on the approved list. Deliberately and publically disagreeing with items on the list could be fatal.

Many modern scholars of Christianity have come from dogmatic backgrounds, and they have thought it natural for a religion to have numerous dogmas. When they considered Judaism, they looked for dogmas, and many years ago they came up with the soteriological dogma that I described above (self-salvation).

The fact is, however, that most religions have not had dogmas—or, if they did, they were not a main feature. The myths of ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Greece were highly variable, and no one was required to believe any one version of, say, the story of Isis and Osiris. This is *the* soteriological story of Egyptian religion, and many

31. I gave a partial history of the view that Pharisaic soteriology was “self-salvation” in Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 33–59. My summary of Billerbeck’s summary gives a very compact description (42–43).

people put their faith in it, but the forms of the story that were popular in different parts of Egypt at different times were diverse. I believe that it would be impossible to make a list of Egyptian dogmas, and certainly not of dogmas that were *required* beliefs. The priests offered sacrifices; they were not overseers of what ordinary people believed.

The second historical peculiarity of Christianity is that it began as a religion of individual salvation; and, although it has now taken on many cultural and social forms, individual salvation—eternal life in a state of bliss—remains a central concern.

The history of the Israelite and Jewish religion is quite different. The Hebrew Bible has very little to say about an afterlife and even less to say about the requirements that individuals must satisfy in order to be saved. Judaism's main concern has long been the preservation of the people as a group, not individual salvation, and in the main bodies of literature there are no dogmas about what individuals should believe in order to have eternal life.

Thus the efforts of Protestant critics of Judaism to find the Jewish dogmas about individual salvation have been misconceived from the start. Judaism (like Islam) has very few dogmas beyond the belief that the God of Israel is the only God. It has laws governing behavior—which are, like all laws, subject to interpretation—but no theological dogmas that practicing Jews are required to hold (though there are a few dogmas that are widely held).

Despite lack of dogma, in the first century there *was* a *common* Jewish view of the relationship between this life and the next. I put this common view under the heading of Pharisaism because the early rabbis were the intellectual heirs of the Pharisees (p. 29 above), most of the evidence for Pharisaism comes from early rabbinic literature, and there is a massive amount of evidence for the common view

in rabbinic literature.³² The view was, however, general throughout Judaism.³³

It is this: Jews are born in the covenant and are members of the chosen people. In order to gain eternal life (“the world to come,” *‘olam ha-ba’*), they should obey the commandments as best they could and atone for transgression. That is, they are born into the “in group” and all they have to do is to remain loyal to the covenant and to the God who gave it. Supererogatory efforts are not required.

When one rabbi said, “All Israel has a share in the world to come,” and listed a few categories of Israelites who do not have a share in the world to come (*m. Sanhedrin* 10:1), he did not thereby create a dogma that all Jews must hold, but he did indicate the general direction of Jewish thought about individual salvation. Only Jews who totally revolt against God and do not atone for their rejection are excluded from the world to come.³⁴ The election of Israel is effective, and it includes proselytes as well as Jews by birth.

God is *just*, *righteous*, and *fair* (one of the rare Jewish dogmas), and therefore he distinguishes between good actions and bad actions, and between good people and bad people. He rewards good and punishes evil. Otherwise he would be capricious. “Punishment,” however, is not damnation, and “reward” is not salvation. The Jew who is punished will still enter the world to come.³⁵

Though he is just and can be counted on to reward and punish, God is a gracious God who has provided numerous means of atonement so that people who transgress can avoid punishment by

32. See Jacob Neusner, *The Rabbinic Traditions about the Pharisees before 70*, 3 vols., (Leiden: Brill, 1971). See also Sanders, *Practice and Belief*, 10 and note.

33. See Sanders, *Practice and Belief*, chap. 13 (“Common Theology”); for soteriology, esp. pp. 72–78.

34. I have discussed atonement in Judaism numerous times; see Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, “Atonement” in the index of subjects; Sanders, *Practice and Belief*, 192f., 252f., 415–17, 454.

35. On God’s justice, reward and punishment, atonement, and the difference between punishment and damnation, see more fully Sanders, *Practice and Belief*, 270–78; 415–18.

atoning for the sin. One finds this view throughout Jewish literature of the period.³⁶

The means of atonement are these:³⁷ (1) While the temple stood, sacrifices for atonement wiped out sins. After the temple was destroyed in 70 CE, there were still several means of atonement. (2) God forgives those who repent. (3) The Day of Atonement is effective, even without the prescribed sacrifices. (4) Sufferings, especially those preceding death, atone (that is, divine punishment in this life atones). (5) Death atones.

Some rabbis parceled out the various categories of sin among these means of atonement,³⁸ but if one looks through the literature one will see that each of these means of atonement is effective. Thus the general Jewish view of the fate of individuals was that being in the covenant and atoning for sins guaranteed a life in the world to come. Since punishment (that is, suffering) and death atone, and since all people suffer and die, then all Jews who accept the covenant and remain in it will enter the world to come.

This conception, which appears very widely and frequently in Jewish literature, is not what Protestants call “works righteousness,” “legalism,” and “self-salvation,” nor is it opposed to belief in the grace of God. God graciously chose Israel and graciously provided means of atonement for every transgression.

It is noteworthy that Paul shared two of these views. The first is that God is just; he punishes evil and rewards good: “There will be anguish and distress for everyone who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for one who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek” (Rom. 2:9-10).

36. For a range of views on atonement in different bodies of Jewish literature (*Jubilees*, Dead Sea Scrolls, and many others), see “Atonement” in the subject index to Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*.

37. *Ibid.*, 158–61; Sanders, *Practice and Belief*, 415–17, 141–44 (the Day of Atonement).

38. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 157–80.

Similarly 1 Cor. 3:8: “Each will receive wages according to the labor of each.” More explicitly: “If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. If the work is burned up [at the judgment], the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire” (1 Cor. 3:14–15).

This is an explicit statement that God may punish transgression at the judgment and that such punishment atones. A little later Paul amplifies the theme:

I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive commendation from God. (1 Cor. 4:4–5)

Secondly, Paul shared the general Jewish view that sickness (viewed as punishment) and death atone.³⁹

Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup [of the Eucharist]. For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves. For this reason many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord we are disciplined [by being punished] so that we may not be condemned along with the world.⁴⁰ (1 Cor. 11:28–32)

Distinguishing reward from salvation and punishment from damnation is crucial to the understanding of both Paul and non-Pauline Judaism. That punishment atones (rather than being damnation) means that there is no double jeopardy. If God punishes people for transgression, that’s enough, and the punished sinners are included in the world to come.

39. For an example of this belief from rabbinic literature, see below, pp. 394–95.

40. *Paideuein* means “to discipline” in general, but also specifically by punishment.

There is one more very important point. The common Jewish view is based on the assumption that the people who are punished by God are in the people of God. The covenant with Israel is the overarching conception. Within it, there are relative degrees of reward and punishment, but the punished humans share in the world to come because they are descendants of Israel.

The passages from Paul's letters quoted just above reveal his assumption that the Corinthians who are suffering are in the group that will be saved because they have previously put their faith in Christ. The punishments that may take place at the judgment do not affect that basic fact. They are saved because they are Christian.

Thus Paul shared the general Jewish view: members of the "in group" will be saved, though God may punish them before or at the time of the judgment.

The difference between Paul and common Judaism on this point is that in Judaism people are born into the covenant and do not need any sort of transformation. They start out in the "in group" and need only to stay in by not rejecting the covenant. In Paul's view (and that of many other Christians), everyone starts life *in need of salvation*. They must all *do something*—convert, put their faith in Christ—in order to get into the group that will be saved. Once they are in the new covenant, however, the system of rewards and punishments works in the same way as in Judaism.

As noted above, the Jewish view of reward, punishment, atonement, and salvation is most richly attested in early rabbinic literature (presumably reflecting many of the views of their Pharisaic forebears). We can, therefore, say that it was "Pharisaic" and that it is very similar to Paul's view. But we cannot say that it was distinctive of the Pharisees. On the contrary, it counts as generally Jewish. One sees it, for example, in the Dead Sea Scrolls, in the *Psalms of Solomon*, and in *1 Enoch*,⁴¹ to name the bodies of literature that immediately

come to mind. It was probably much more widespread. Thus the similarity between Paul and Pharisaism on this point does not prove that he was a Palestinian Pharisee.

Since many people believe that Paul's view of righteousness by faith is opposed to the idea of a just God who rewards and punishes according to deeds, I shall say here that in Paul's letters the two are not in opposition to each other. In Paul's letters punishment and reward apply to people who are in the group that will be saved, as we shall see more fully in 1 Corinthians and elsewhere.

I hope that the above pages on Pharisaism manage to convey useful information about not only the Pharisees but also about Judaism in general. Now, at last, let us turn to the aspects of Pharisaism that are directly relevant to Paul's claim that he was a Pharisee. As we noted above, the Pharisees, besides being legal experts, were famous for three general positions: belief in an afterlife, combining belief in fate with free will, and observance of non-biblical "traditions of the fathers" (or "elders"). Did Paul, as a Diaspora Pharisee, share these three positions?

Afterlife, Traditions of the Fathers, Free Will

According to Josephus, the Pharisees maintained that "every soul is imperishable, but the soul of the good alone passes into another body, while the souls of the wicked suffer eternal punishment" (*War* 2.163). In his second summary about the Pharisees, Josephus states their belief in similar terms:

They believe that souls have power to survive death and that there are rewards and punishments under the earth for those who have led lives of virtue or vice: eternal imprisonment is the lot of evil souls, while the good souls receive an easy passage to a new life. (*Antiq.* 18.14)

41. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 284–85 (DSS); 407–8 (*Pss. Sol.*); 358 (1 *En.*).

We may doubt that the Pharisees actually believed in the transmigration of souls to other bodies (as in the first passage); Josephus was dressing them up in terms that he thought would be familiar to gentile readers.⁴² Pharisees certainly, however, believed in an afterlife—as did most Jews, probably all but the Sadducees. According to Acts, when Paul was on trial before the high priest and his council, he “noticed that some were Sadducees and others were Pharisees,” and, to create a dispute among his judges, he said, “Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. I am on trial concerning the hope of the resurrection of the dead” (Acts 23:6). Members of the two main parties then begin to disagree with each other. Paul’s letters also bear abundant witness to his belief in resurrection (e.g., 1 Cor. 15). This was not a *distinctive* Pharisaic belief, since many other Jews shared it, but it was *characteristic* of the Pharisees, and Josephus listed it as one of their most characteristic beliefs.

Maintaining “traditions of the fathers” was an equally notable aspect of Pharisaism. According to Josephus, the Pharisees “passed on to the people certain regulations handed down by former generations and not recorded in the Laws of Moses” (*Antiq.* 13.297; similarly 13.408). In the Greek of both passages, Josephus used the words *paradosis* (tradition) and *patroi* (fathers). Similarly, according to Mark 7:3, the Pharisees observed “the tradition (*paradosis*) of the elders” (“elders” replaces the more usual “fathers”); see also verses 7, 8, 9 and 13, as well as the parallel passage in Matthew 15. The study of rabbinic literature also reveals the importance of non-biblical “traditions of the fathers” in Pharisaism. For example, the law of *‘erúvín*, which allowed the carrying of pots and food from one house to another on the Sabbath, provided that they were linked by

42. More precisely, it was probably Josephus’s source, Nicolaus of Damascus, who dressed the Jewish parties in the garb of Greek philosophical schools, but this is a complication that we do not need to consider.

doorposts and lintels, was a Pharisaic tradition that was not accepted by the Sadducees; it has no direct basis in the Bible and is rather a “tradition of the fathers” that may have been uniquely Pharisaic.⁴³

In the case of the Pharisaic “traditions of the fathers,” it is certain that the traditions were extrabiblical.⁴⁴ Unfortunately, we cannot be confident that this is what Paul meant when he wrote that he was extremely zealous for his “ancestral traditions” (literally, “paternal traditions”).⁴⁵ The first part of the sentence is “I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age.” This inclines me to think that his “ancestral traditions” were simply the customs and traditions common throughout Judaism. All people had ancestral traditions, many of which they wanted to maintain, and the Jews of the Diaspora (as we shall see) were especially determined to maintain theirs. When Paul was persecuting the Christians (Gal. 1:13), he probably saw this as maintaining the customs of his people. It was in that way that he was expressing his zeal for his traditions and was advancing in Judaism beyond many of his own age (Gal. 1:14).

If by “traditions” Paul meant “Pharisaic traditions,” this would be an adequate explanation of his saying that “as to the law” he was a Pharisee. Then, of course, we would have to find out what these particular Pharisaic traditions were, and there, I fear, we would fail. I do not see any passages in Paul’s letters that might qualify as Pharisaic traditions and thus justify his self-description.

Josephus offers a third major point about the Pharisees that is worth noting: they believed in divine providence (that is, that God directly controlled history) and also in free will. “They attribute everything to Fate and to God; they hold that to act rightly or otherwise rests, indeed, for the most part with men, but that in each action Fate

43. For Sadducean opposition to this Pharisaic tradition, see *m. Eruvin* 6:2.

44. E.g., Josephus, *Antiq.* 13.295–97; *m. Eruvin* 6:2.

45. In *Antiq.* 13.297, Josephus’s phrase is *paradōseōs tōn paterōn*; in 13.408 *patrōan paradōsin*. In Gal. 1:14, Paul wrote *patrikōn paradōseōn*.

cooperates" (*War* 2.162f.). As he puts it elsewhere, Pharisees held that "it was God's good pleasure that there should be a fusion and that the will of man with his virtue and vice should be admitted to the council-chamber of fate" (*Antiq.* 18.13).

Since the Middle Ages, many people have regarded predestination and free will as alternatives; to most of us, their combination appears to be logically impossible. In the ancient world, however, few people saw the matter in this way, and many happily combined them. We see this, for example, in the Dead Sea Scrolls—which are not Pharisaic.⁴⁶

Paul also combined providence and free will, as we may see in Romans. In Rom. 9:16, for example, he writes that the election, or God's mercy, "depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy." Later in the chapter he mentions those whom "he has prepared beforehand for glory" (9:23). Phrases such as these point toward divine determination. Yet, in Romans 10, Paul states that people must call on the Lord to be saved, and he asks, "How are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard?" and so forth. He concludes, "So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:13-17). This sounds as if salvation depends very much on human exertion (the efforts of preachers) and human will (believing). Conceivably this combination of divine determination and human freewill is another

46. According to Josephus's summaries of the three parties, the Sadducees believed entirely in free will and did not believe in divine providence (i.e., that God directly controlled history); the Essenes believed in providence but not in free will, and the Pharisees combined the two. This description, which Josephus has doubtless taken over from his gentile source, Nicolaus of Damascus, seems not to be entirely right. The authors of the Scrolls—who may have been Essenes but who were certainly not Pharisees—believed in both providence and free will. Regardless of who believed in providence and free will, and of how people may have combined them, it is clear that the Dead Sea sect did not split off from the rest of Judaism over this interesting theological topic.

aspect of Paul's Pharisaism, even though the combination was not exclusively Pharisaic.

In addition to belief in the resurrection and the combination of predestination and free will, it is tempting to describe Paul's expert knowledge of the Bible as Pharisaic. Certainly the Palestinian Pharisees were renowned for their biblical expertise. But this is not a very strong pillar to lean on. All Jews knew the contents of the Bible fairly well, thanks to weekly meetings of the local synagogue, where the text was read and expounded.⁴⁷ In the Diaspora there were biblical experts, who, among other things, translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek. Numerous Jews had a very precise and detailed knowledge of the Bible—as did Paul. While it is true that every Pharisee was an expert in studying the Bible, it is not true that every expert in biblical studies was a Pharisee.

Palestinian Pharisees were also expert in producing rules that people could follow to be sure that they were obeying the law. These rules, *halakôt* in rabbinic Hebrew, occupy a large percentage of early rabbinic literature.

I have tried my best to answer Samuel Sandmel's implied question (p. 41 above): what was a Diaspora Pharisee? I have not been able to answer it very well, suggesting only belief in the resurrection, possibly the combination of predestination and free will, and rigorous biblical study—not one of which is uniquely Pharisaic.

Summary of Paul's Pharisaism

This has been a wide-ranging topic, but it helps us to put Paul into his context in ancient Judaism. Paul, of course, shared many ideas with Palestinian Pharisees, since Pharisees were part of "Common

47. On synagogues and synagogal practices, see Lee I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999); Steven Fine, ed. *Sacred Realm: The Emergence of the Synagogue in the Ancient World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

Judaism” and held numerous opinions that were also held by other Jews.⁴⁸ Paul knew enough about Pharisaism to identify himself as a Pharisee, but I do not see anything in his letters that points toward his knowledge of exclusively Pharisaic views or practices.

Belief in the resurrection might have been enough for Paul to call himself a Pharisee “as to the law,” because it seems to have been a very prominent issue in Palestinian Pharisaism, even though it was not unique to the Pharisees. Acts 23:6 explicitly points in that direction.

Although many people combined fate and freewill, it is *possible* that Paul regarded this as one of his Pharisaic characteristics.

Similarly, it is conceivable that he regarded his expertise in knowing and interpreting the Bible as Pharisaic. Even though Pharisees were by no means the only experts, they were renowned for their “precision” in understanding the biblical text.

Since there are no traces of uniquely Pharisaic ideas and practices in Paul’s letters, readers may remain agnostic on the question of whether or not Paul received a Pharisaic education. Scholars who find Pharisaic positions in Paul’s letters, or the denial of them, are, in every case that I have noted, making the mistake of assuming that the Pharisees were the only Jews who had legal positions or the only ones who had purity practices.

We noted, however, one point that counts against Paul’s being a Palestinian Pharisee: he seems not to have been highly educated in how to make general principles or vague laws in the Bible apply *precisely* to everyday life, which was an important point of Pharisaism.

The Biography of Paul in Acts 1–9: Conclusion

Several pages ago I rejected the views of Acts regarding the description of Paul the persecutor: that he was living in Jerusalem and

48. For common Judaism, see Sanders, *Practice and Belief*, 47–49 and “People, ordinary” in the subject index.

was well-known to the early Christians. I also rejected the view that after his conversion he went to Jerusalem. Both statements are clearly and forcefully contradicted in Galatians. I doubted that he had grown up in Jerusalem and had been a student of Gamaliel, because that view is best explained by Luke's Jerusalem-centric tendency. There was, however, other evidence in Paul's own words that might point toward his education in Jerusalem: "a Hebrew born of Hebrews" and "as to the law, a Pharisee." We have now seen that these phrases are subject to other interpretations and do not carry the day. Thus I conclude that we need to look elsewhere to understand Paul's education, his career as a persecutor, and his actions after his conversion. In the next section, we shall consider the indirect evidence in Paul's letters that shows that he was a Diaspora Jew, educated in the Diaspora, holding views that were common in the Diaspora and that are not to be found in Palestinian sources. He persecuted not Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, but Jews in the Diaspora who had accepted the Christian message.

The author of Acts, as a good Hellenistic historian, needed a full biography of his hero, and he needed to write a fluent narrative—one in which there are no gaps. He succeeded in his aim admirably: Acts 1–9 make a whopping good story, one with surface plausibility.

My opinion is that the author of Acts would have written a more accurate account if he had been better informed about Paul's entire life. He seems to have had much better sources for Paul's apostolic travels than he had for Paul's early years. But even in periods in which he had no sources at all he still had to write something. He wanted to tell the entire story of Paul's life, but sometimes he had to guess or invent for the sake of the narrative. In some instances, he went astray, as we now know from Paul's letters—which the author of Acts did not have the opportunity of reading.

I am not hostile to Acts; I respect it for what it is—a good

Hellenistic history. As stated above, Acts is quite useful in sketching Paul's travels and the cities he entered, as well as in other ways that will appear in this study from time to time. But the primary source for Paul must be his own letters. In the course of this study, we shall see that the comparison of Acts and Paul often shows that Luke was not omniscient about Paul's activities and that he had very little understanding—if any—of Paul's theology.

Paul: A Diaspora Jew

We have seen that Paul's letters—our primary evidence—show no specific signs of Pharisaism; now we shall see that they *do* connect him with Diaspora Judaism. His letters show him to be a member of the Greek-speaking Jewish Diaspora, and there are numerous specific points that he shares with other Greek-speaking Jews and not with Palestinian Pharisees.⁴⁹ I shall begin with a general description of the Greek-speaking Jewish Diaspora and then consider Paul's education in the Diaspora. This will involve fairly substantial discussions of aspects of Judaism.

The Greek-Speaking Diaspora

The Greek word *diaspora* means “dispersion.” It is used to refer to a voluntary, gradual, and peaceful movement of people out of their original homeland. It is thus not an “exile,” which is a movement of people by force, nor is it an invasion or a conquest. One could speak of an Italian diaspora in the United States, a Pakistani diaspora in the United Kingdom, a Polish diaspora in Canada, and so on.

Most frequently, however, the word refers to one of the two large dispersions of Jews in the ancient world. Long before Paul's day,

49. See the discussions of vice lists, prostitution, marriage for the sake of desire, and spiritual (or reasonable) sacrifice in chap. 13, chap. 11, chap. 9, chap. 23.

there was a substantial Jewish Diaspora in Babylon (east of Palestine). After the conquests of Alexander the Great in the fourth century BCE a substantial Jewish Diaspora developed in the Hellenistic world (west of Palestine), which was later conquered by Rome and thus became the Greco-Roman World. The Jews who had settled in Greek-speaking cities now belonged to the Roman Empire. Rome did not require the conquered people east of Italy to speak Latin. Rather, in the East, the ruling Romans spoke Greek. In Paul's day there were also many Greek-speakers in Rome, including some members of the aristocracy, traders, merchants, and most of the slaves. Paul's letter to the church at Rome shows that the church members knew Greek. It was the international language of the Roman Empire.

By Paul's day there were communities of Jews in all of the principal urban centers around the Mediterranean Sea. Acts speaks of visitors to Jerusalem (presumably at a time of pilgrimage) from Parthia, Mesopotamia, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Cyrene, Rome, and elsewhere (Acts 2:9-11). Leaving Mesopotamia (Babylon) aside, this list includes Asia Minor, part of North Africa, and part of Italy.

Strabo, a Greek historian and geographer (c. 63 BCE – 24 CE), wrote that “this people [the Jews] has already made its way into every city, and it is not easy to find any place in the habitable world which has not received this nation and in which it has not made its power felt.”⁵⁰

Philo, a wealthy and highly educated Jew of Alexandria, Egypt, claimed that Jerusalem was actually the capital of most countries, in addition to Judea, “because of the colonies” of Jews who live in Egypt, Phoenicia, Syria, Pamphylia, Cilicia, Asia (as far as Bithynia), and numerous European regions and cities—Thessaly, Boeotia, Macedonia, Aetolia, Attica, Argos, Corinth, and the Peloponnese.

50. Strabo as quoted in Josephus, *Antiq.* 14.115. See M. Stern, “The Jewish Diaspora,” in *The Jewish People in the First Century*, ed. Shemuel Safrai (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1974), 1:118.

Moreover, Jews also had settled in the Islands, such as Cyprus and Crete.⁵¹

The history and characteristics of these various Jewish communities are obviously beyond the scope this work. We shall have to content ourselves with a few generalizations about the Greek-speaking or western Diaspora as a whole.

1. The Jews in the Greek-speaking Diaspora were in some ways like the Jews who immigrated to the United States. They wanted to fit in and to make as few ripples in society as possible, while nevertheless retaining their religion and customs. They took Greek or Latin names; they learned the Greek language; they did not try to change pagans into Jews.
2. The Jews in the western Diaspora lived in the midst of gentiles and consequently were living in the midst of idolatry. The gentile citizens of Asia Minor and Greece (the two areas of Paul's apostolic efforts) believed in diverse gods, whom they worshipped with sacrifices, festivals, and sometimes games (athletic contests) and drama. (Greco-Roman civic religion is described more fully in chap. 9)

At the extreme, devout Jewish belief in the one God and hatred of the evils of idolatry might have led them to try to damage pagan temples and destroy idols. Greek-speaking Jews, however, wanted to live in peace with their neighbors. Moreover, they were taught to regard such actions as prohibited by the law of Moses. The translators of the Septuagint (point 5 below) provided Greek-speaking Jews with a biblical justification for tolerance of gentile gods. The Hebrew of Exod. 22:27 means "you shall not revile God," but "God" is plural, as is usually the case: Hebrew distinguished the God of Israel from

51. Philo, *Legatio* ["Embassy to Gaius"], 281–82. See Stern, "Jewish Diaspora," 118.

any other god by using the plural for the singular Israelite deity. The plural *'elohim* is usually translated in the Greek Bible, the Septuagint (abbreviated as LXX), as “God,” meaning “the God of Israel.” In this particular verse (LXX and ET 22:28), however, the Septuagint kept the plural, so that in Greek the commandment read, “you shall not revile the gods,” that is, the gods of the gentiles.

Both Philo and Josephus interpreted this sentence to mean that Jews were forbidden to blaspheme other people’s gods, and Josephus extended the law, so that it prohibited them from robbing foreign temples and taking treasure (for example, in war) that had been dedicated to other gods. Philo also construed Lev. 24:15 (do not curse God) to mean do not curse the gods of the cities.⁵² Jews tolerated temples built for other gods, both outside Palestine and in the cities of Palestine where gentiles lived (e.g., Caesarea).

Roman law required gentiles to tolerate Jews, as we shall see in detail below. Both Julius Caesar and Augustus had given the Jews special rights in the empire, and the city councils and provincial governors went along with these rights, which basically allowed Jews to live by their own laws in the midst of gentile cities.⁵³

3. The Jewish communities throughout the Mediterranean felt a bond of unity with one another and with the homeland in Jewish Palestine. To offend one was to offend all. At times, of course, there was internal strife within a Jewish community, and sometimes there was a good deal of hostility between various Jewish groups. But when the chips were down, Jewish unity usually prevailed.⁵⁴
4. The central unifying force was religion as represented by the

52. See Josephus, *Antiq.* 4.207; *Apion* 2.237; Philo, *Spec. Laws* 1.53; *Moses* 2.205; E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief* (London: SCM, 1992), 242.

53. For details, see above, p. 51; Sanders, *Practice and Belief*, 211–12.

54. See *ibid.*, 130, 144, 237–38, 256–57, 264–65.

temple and the Scripture. Jews in the far-flung Diaspora gathered money and sent it to the temple, and they, like their Palestinian counterparts, studied the Bible in weekly synagogue services.

5. The Greek-speaking Jews came to want their own Bible, in Greek. This indicates that fluency in Hebrew had begun to decline. I shall not speculate on the actual historical processes that resulted in the publication of the Jewish Scriptures in Greek. We should note, however, a work called *The Letter of Aristeas*, which was written in the second century BCE, almost certainly in Alexandria (which succeeded Athens as the intellectual capital of the Greco-Roman world). *Aristeas* tells the charming story of the desire of the Ptolemaic king of Egypt (presumably Ptolemy II Philadelphus) to collect the world's literature. His library needed a copy of the Jewish Scripture that could be read in the common language, Greek.

According to the story, the high priest in Jerusalem sent seventy-two translators to Alexandria. They went into separate rooms and emerged with translations that they compared and harmonized to establish a final text. The number seventy-two—or rather, the number 70, which appears in some ancient accounts of the episode—led to the designation of the Greek Bible as “The Septuagint.” The abbreviation LXX is 70 in Roman numerals.

Scholars are accustomed to turning to the critical edition of the LXX by Alfred Rahlfs and calling it “the Septuagint.” But the edited text is based on various manuscripts, and there are some disagreements among the manuscripts. The same is true, of course, of the New Testament. With regard to the LXX, one scholar noted that “There must have been considerable confusion in its transmission, due to the normal scribal corruptions and a growing incomprehension of the

intentions of the translators, who had used a rather flexible technique and had not worked on a standard original.”⁵⁵ I am an amateur in the field, but it seems to me that the precise text of the LXX is less secure than that of the New Testament.

The reason for making this point is that Paul’s quotations from the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible are not always precisely the same as Rahlfs’s text of the LXX. Some of these differences may have arisen because Paul’s memory was not always perfect.⁵⁶ But in other cases—we cannot say which—he might have studied in his youth a text that was not precisely the same as Rahlfs’s edition.

6. Greek-speaking Jews regarded the LXX as Scripture, not as an inferior approximation of the real Bible. If anything, it was accorded even more respect than the King James Version of the Bible, a translation that a committee produced in 1611, which for a long time was “the Bible” in the English-speaking Protestant world. I note that crossword puzzles that wish you to fill three squares with “est” or “eth” ask for “a biblical ending.” This shows the assumption that “the Bible” is the King James Version. Greek and Hebrew, the actual languages of the Bible, do not have these endings, nor do modern English translations.
7. Although Diaspora Jews were distant from the temple and its sacrifices, they were loyal to them and (as we noted) sent money for their support. Many Jews went on pilgrimage to attend a major festival, especially Passover, but in any given year that must have been a small minority of the Jews who lived abroad. In addition to giving money and feeling loyal, however, Diaspora Jews wanted to be able to *worship* God, even though

55. SuD, *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 4, col. 851–56.

56. On study as memorization, see p. 71.

they could not do so in the traditional way, by offering sacrifices in the temple.

The Greek word for a sacrificial rite is *latreia*, translated “service” or “worship,” but meaning “worship by sacrificing to a god.” To help compensate for the lack of a temple and sacrifices, the idea of a “mental” or “spiritual” sacrifice arose. We find this in Philo and Paul. Philo wrote, “what is precious in the sight of God is not the number of [sacrificial] victims immolated but the true purity of a *rational* [*logikon*] spirit in him who makes the sacrifice” (*Spec.* 1.277). Paul wrote to Christians “to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual [*logikēn*] worship” (Rom. 12:1). The adjective *logikos* means “mental, reasonable, or spiritual,” as distinct from physical. In such a sacrifice there is no blood and no carcass. Thus the separation from the temple led the Jewish religion in the direction of inner spiritual commitment rather than the killing of animals, the common way of worship in the ancient world.⁵⁷

Jewish Rights in the Diaspora

Jewish laws and customs, of course, often ran afoul of gentile laws and customs. From the time of Julius Caesar on, the Romans gave the Jews special rights for their protection. In part, this was simply the standard Roman respect for the deep-seated and ancient traditions and religions of the people they conquered. It was also prudent. Why offend such a large and unified group in the empire if one does not need to do so?

The Roman civil wars of the period from 49 BCE to 30 BCE, above all, were occasions for giving the Jews special privileges, since

57. See also below, pp. 690–91.

they provided opportunities for Jewish rulers in Palestine (specifically Antipater and his son Herod) to support one of the warring factions.⁵⁸

First, in 48–47 BCE there was a war for supremacy in Rome between the two greatest generals of the age, Gaius Julius Caesar (“Caesar”) and Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus (“Pompey”). After a defeat, Pompey took refuge in Egypt but was assassinated. Caesar entered Alexandria with a few troops and sent for additional manpower. The relieving army was enhanced by three thousand Jewish troops sent by Antipater, the “right hand man”⁵⁹ of the Hasmonean king Hyrcanus II, in whose name he acted.

Caesar personally rewarded Antipater for his efforts, but, more to the point, in the wake of his success in Egypt the great conqueror gave valuable rights to the Jewish people throughout the empire. The various cities of the empire and the governors of provinces fell into line and bestowed special rights on the Jews in their domains. Josephus quotes decrees and letters granting these rights to the Jews throughout the empire. Some of the main rights are these:

- a. The right to assemble and to have a place of assembly (a synagogue): Josephus, *Antiq.* 14.214–16; 227, 235, 257–58, 260–61.
- b. The right to keep the Sabbath, not being forced to work or go to court: 14.226 and elsewhere.
- c. The right to have their “ancestral” food available in the markets: 14.226 and elsewhere.
- d. The right to decide their own affairs: 14.235 and elsewhere.

58. On the Roman civil wars of this period, see F. E. Adcock, ch. 16, *CAH*, vol. 9; M. P. Charlesworth, ch. 1, *CAH*, vol. 10; and W. W. Tarn and M. P. Charlesworth, chs. 3 and 4 of the same volume.

59. Antipater sometimes had the title “procurator.” It is not clear what title he held, if any, when he brought troops to the aid of Caesar.

- e. The right to contribute money to the temple in Jerusalem: 14.214, 227.⁶⁰

Later, the third great civil war, between Octavian and Antony and Cleopatra, concluded with the deaths of Antony and Cleopatra (30 BCE). At that time Antipater's son, Herod the Great was king of Judea. Although a long-time friend of Antony, Herod promised Octavian that he would be his loyal supporter. Herod became Octavian's most effective "friend and ally," or, more crudely, "puppet king." Octavian took the name "Augustus." Herod also formed a friendship with Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa, who had led Octavian's army against Antony and Cleopatra and had become Octavian's son-in-law. Agrippa was often in the East, restoring the authority of the emperor after insurrections and the like.

In 15 BCE, Agrippa honored the Jews and symbolized Rome's friendship by visiting Jerusalem. He offered a hecatomb of oxen (100) in the Jerusalem temple and made a financial donation to the populace.

Shortly after that visit, in 14 BCE, Herod (who had joined Agrippa in Asia Minor, where Agrippa was putting down an uprising) learned that the Jews in Ionia (western Asia Minor) were complaining that some of their rights had been violated. Herod asked his courtier Nicolaus of Damascus to argue the case, which was tried in Ephesus before Agrippa, who decided in favor of the Jews.

Thanks to Herod, Augustus became a firm supporter of the special Jewish rights. Josephus gives a summary of some of Augustus's

60. See Josephus, *Antiq.* 14.190-267; for this list and further passages, see Sanders, *Practice and Belief*, 212. It is doubtful that Josephus's passages on Jewish rights always quote the decrees precisely, though the general points are reliable. For a critical presentation of the history and the documents quoted by Josephus, see Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, rev. and ed. Geza Vermes and Fergus Millar (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1973), 1:270-75.

decrees supporting Jewish rights in *Antiq.* 16.161–66. The topics are on the whole the same as the rights decreed by Julius Caesar (above).

Because Herod's support of Jews in Ionia reveals a side of him of which most people are unaware, I conclude by quoting Arnaldo Momigliano: "In the Diaspora, where men could better appreciate the advantages of Herod's prestige in the Gentile world . . . Herod enjoyed great popularity which lasted long after his death, and it is worth noting that one of the Jewish communities in Rome was called after him."⁶¹

I wish to make two last comments about the rights of Diaspora Jews. One is that freedom of assembly, which the Jews enjoyed, was very rare (or, better, almost entirely absent) in the ancient world, since it could lead to sedition. The right to assemble was so important, and so rarely granted by dictators, that it is guaranteed in the first amendment to the American Constitution.

The second is that the right of Jews to export money from Roman provinces to Jerusalem was highly unpopular with Roman governors because it reduced the total amount of money in the province. Augustus was especially determined and forceful in protecting this right. For example, he declared that the Jewish donations were sacred, having the same sanctity as the money in a Greek temple. The passage is worth partial quotation: "[I]t has been decided by me and my council under oath . . . that the Jews may follow their own customs in accordance with the law of their fathers . . . and that their sacred monies shall be inviolable [*en asyiliai*: "given asylum"] and may be sent up to Jerusalem and given to the treasurers in Jerusalem. . . ." (Josephus, *Antiq.* 162–63).

Thus as a Diaspora Jew who spoke Greek, Paul belonged to a large

61. Arnaldo Momigliano, "Herod of Judaea," *CAH* 10:331–32. For the sequence of events, see Momigliano, 10:330–331. In Josephus, *Antiq.* 16.12–65, there are many more details of Herod, Agrippa, and the rights of Jews.

and important group within the Roman Empire, a group that could obtain the ear of the emperor or the governors of each province.

Despite their numbers, their right to continue their ancient customs, their special privileges, and their freedom of worship (both by attending synagogues and by sending money to the temple in Jerusalem), many Diaspora Jews still hoped for something better: they hoped that God would fulfill all of the prophetic promises. Therefore there were many who were not entirely satisfied by their present state—in which, though privileged, they still lived under foreign rule. I have given a brief summary of various future hopes in chapter 14 of *Judaism: Practice and Belief*. I shall here cite two passages from that summary.

In the third *Sibylline Oracle* (c. 170–160 BCE), well before the Roman period), we read that in days to come all people will worship the God of Israel (3.616–617); however, those who attack the temple will be destroyed by God; then gentiles will send gifts to the temple and study God's law.

In the Roman era, Philo (c. 20 BCE–50 CE), who had every reason to be satisfied with his present lot (he was wealthy and learned, a leader of the Jews in Alexandria, and politically important) had a form of eschatology, according to which the Jews would be able to return to their homeland thanks to a “permanent and bloodless victory” (*Rewards and Punishments* 97, 164–65). There they would rebuild their native cities and have great wealth. No one would be able to contest their sovereignty (*Rewards and Punishments* 168).

I assume that many Diaspora Jews disliked the fact that they lived under a non-Jewish government. It is quite common for members of a national or ethnic group to dislike it when they are annexed into a vast empire. One may doubt, however, that all Jews would actually have been happier under a native king, because many people who have lived under native rulers have also grumbled. In the case of the

Jews, of course, the hope was not just for a native king, but for the rule of God, whom they expected to intervene in human history in a decisive way and transform the world.

Hopes for future independence and a state ruled by God, however, did not lead orators in the synagogues to stress eschatology in such a way as to lead to social unrest. Jews, to repeat, wanted to live in peace in their new homes among gentiles. Patience prevailed. One sees this in Philo, who looked forward to a full conversion of all Jews to “virtue,” which would “strike awe into their masters, who will set them free, ashamed to rule over men better than themselves” (*Rewards and Punishments* 168). Meanwhile they should remain patient as they awaited the great days that God planned for them (some of which are discussed below, pp. 467–70).⁶²

While they waited, they had the comforts of the covenant in the form of Jewish solidarity and the success of Jews in obtaining the right to worship their own God in their own way. I recall some of the main points that illustrate the covenantal solidarity that Diaspora Jews shared with other Jews.

- a. Thousands of Jews went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem to worship at the temple.⁶³
- b. Jews in the Diaspora sent money to the temple.⁶⁴

62. N. T. Wright has proposed that most Jews perceived this period of waiting for the fulfillment of the prophetic promises of a glorious future for Israel as a long extension of the Babylonian Exile. See Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 68–72; *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), xvii–xviii and elsewhere (see “Return” in the index). I think that the term *exile* for the various forms of dissatisfaction that we see in the Second Temple period is inappropriate. Nor is the evidence for the use of the term *exile* very thick. I should very much enjoy analyzing the evidence and debating the issue in detail, but this falls outside the parameters of the present book. For the debate, see further C. Newman, ed., *Jesus and the Restoration of Israel: A Critical Assessment of N. T. Wright’s Jesus and the Victory of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999); Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 139–63.

63. Sanders, *Practice and Belief*, 126–27.

64. *Ibid.*, 212; Sanders, *Jewish Law*, 49–50, 292–94.

- c. They all believed in the same Bible, though they read it in Greek rather than Hebrew.

Thus, even though not all of the prophetic promises had been fulfilled, the Diaspora Jews of Paul's day did not think that their religion had failed. They thought that it was flourishing. They thought that God still accepted their prayers and their worship and that one day he would fulfill the prophetic promises to Israel.

Asia Minor

As a subtopic under the Diaspora, I should explain a few things about Asia Minor, where Paul spent a lot of his time as an apostle. This peninsula, bounded on the north by the Black Sea, on the south by the Mediterranean Sea, on the east by Syria, and on the west by the Aegean Sea, the Bosphorus, and Europe, was a very large percentage of the Roman Empire.

Asia Minor is also called "Anatolia," from a Greek word related to "sunrise": it was east of Greece. Anatolia was wealthy compared to Greece. It had long coastlines and several ports and so was important in trade.

A strait, called "the Bosphorus," runs from the Black Sea to the Sea of Marmara, which opens on to the Mediterranean Sea. The Bosphorus separates Asia from Europe. Constantinople, now Istanbul, straddles the Bosphorus and thus could control trade by land east and west (between Europe and Asia) and by sea south and north (between the Mediterranean and Black Seas).

Over the centuries, various tribes or ethnic groups invaded and then settled parts of Asia Minor, with the result that for a long time there were various languages, cultures, and religious traditions. Greek language and culture dominated in Ionia, the cities near the Aegean Sea.

In 547 BCE, Persia, the great new power that had swept the Middle East, defeated Lydia and soon consolidated its hold on all of Asia Minor. From there it threatened Greece and twice invaded, though it was turned back each time. In 334 BCE, the Macedonian king, Alexander, invaded Asia Minor, claiming his cause to be the liberation of the Greek cities. He went much farther than Ionia, however, and finally destroyed the Persian Empire. After his death, his generals divided up the new empire.

The successors of Alexander did not have a firm hold on all of Asia Minor, and there were still independent kingdoms. The general culture and the common language, however, became Greek-ish. The period after Alexander and before Rome's conquest is called "Hellenistic," to distinguish it from "Hellenic": "sort of Greek" rather than "Greek." After the Roman conquest, we speak of "the Greco-Roman World."

In 190 BCE, Rome defeated a descendant of one of Alexander's generals, Antiochus III, the Great, whose possessions included parts of Asia Minor. Rome did not immediately seize Asia Minor, but rather turned it over to "friends and allies." When Attalus III, the king of Pergamum, died, however, he willed his territory to the Roman Republic. Aided by this gift, in 133 BCE Rome established its first colony in Asia Minor, called the Province of Asia.

From that beginning, Rome conquered the rest of Asia Minor piecemeal, sometimes installing a Roman governor, sometimes relying on kings to govern on Rome's behalf. Eventually, all of Asia Minor was divided into Roman provinces. Rome changed the borders and even the names of the provinces from time to time (see, for example, the appendix on Galatia, p. 759 n. 26 on Cilicia).

People remembered the pre-Persian tribal or ethnic names of the regions, however, and those who knew Asia Minor well used the regional names rather than the new Roman provincial names—which

fluctuated from time to time. It is noteworthy that both Paul and Acts use the regional names. Thus, for example, Paul was from Cilicia rather than Syria, though during his lifetime Cilicia was in the province of Syria. He writes that sometime after his conversion he went into “the regions of Syria and Cilicia” (Gal. 1:21), not “to the province of Syria.” The Roman provincial names do not appear in either Acts or Paul, except in the case of Asia, for which both writers used the provincial name, probably because that province had been established for such a long time. Thus Acts 6:9, “from Cilicia “(a region) “and Asia” (the province); Acts 15:23, “in Syria” (a province) “and Cilicia” (a region); Acts 2:9, “Pontus” (a region) “and Asia” (a province).

In the appendix on the location of Galatia, p. 756, I give a list of regional names with their location in provinces during Paul’s adulthood.

Paul’s Education

Acts gives us the very valuable information that Paul was from Tarsus, in eastern Cilicia (Acts 22:3), and that he had learned a trade, called “tentmaking” (18:3). Paul’s letters confirm this fairly well. Since his first missionary efforts were in the “regions of Syria and Cilicia,” we may say that he was “at home” in that area. He had previously been persecuting Christians in Damascus, which is in Syria. As we shall see below (pp. 112–13), being a tentmaker required few tools to lug around, and it would fit into his apostolic career very well. He states directly that he worked with his hands while he was an apostle (1 Cor. 9:6; cf. 1 Thess. 2:9; 1 Cor. 4:12).

Therefore, the first thing we know about his education was that he learned a trade that required manual labor. This did not involve his going to school. He either learned his trade from his father or during an apprenticeship to someone else.

From reading his letters we know that he was fluent in Greek and that he knew the text of the LXX extremely well. He was also able to write (1 Cor. 16:21; Gal. 6:11). Thus we know that he was educated in a Greek-speaking school.

We have no direct evidence about the education of Jewish boys in the Diaspora, though we can see the results. There were numerous Jewish authors who wrote in Greek, and they show knowledge of the Bible in its Greek translation. The two most widely known Hellenistic Jewish authors are Philo and Josephus, whom we frequently cite in this work. There were, however, a lot of others, though their works were imperfectly preserved. One will see a substantial number of Diaspora authors and publications in the two volumes of *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors*.⁶⁵ We may be sure that it was possible for a Jewish boy to receive a Jewish education in the Diaspora.

A few Jewish boys went to an ordinary Greek educational institution (a *gymnasion*), in which they received an ordinary Greek education. In this case, they would have become proficient in Greek literature, such as drama and poetry. Such boys, however, were a small minority, since most families would have feared such close contact with pagans. Therefore in the Diaspora there must have been schools that taught the Septuagint, possibly along with some of the great works of Greek authors.

Education in the ancient world was heavily orientated toward repetition and memorization. Beginning students were faced with lines of letters with no spaces and no punctuation. They had first to learn to identify each individual word, and then to find the periods (sentences, clauses, and the like). They recited out loud and would

65. Carl R. Holladay, ed., *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983, 1989).

have to go over their text until they could read it easily and without stumbling.

Repetition naturally led to a good deal of memorization, but memorization was a good in and of itself. Boys memorized great orations, for example, as a way of learning public speaking. One of the goals of public figures was to be able to find an apt quotation from a famous author in order to drive home or “prove” a point.

Paul’s letters show that he could do this. His quotations, however, with one exception, are from the Bible, not from Homer, Euripides, or Plato. The one exception is an adage: “Bad company ruins good morals” in 1 Cor. 15:33, which immediately follows a quotation from Isaiah. I think that if Paul had memorized the right bits of Greek philosophy he would have come up with a quotation in 2 Cor. 4:18, where he wrote that what is seen is transient but what cannot be seen is eternal. Similarly it would have been easy for a scholar of Greek philosophy to use a quotation to support Phil. 4:11, “I have learned to be *autarkēs*,” “self-sufficient.” The word was applied to Socrates, and it was used in various schools of Greek philosophy, including Platonism and Stoicism.

Paul was by no means ignorant of Greek thought, but in the surviving letters he never quotes from a Greek author. His ability to quote the Bible, however, is remarkable. The simplest explanation is that he had gone to a school that primarily taught the text of the Greek Bible (the Septuagint), and that he had studied the Bible in the time-honored way, by memorizing.

Two aspects of Paul’s use of quotations in argumentation stand out when considered in the light of memorization. One is that he could do “word studies,” which would otherwise be very difficult. In Galatians 3 he quotes the only two passages in the Septuagint that combine the roots for “faith” and “righteousness” (Gen. 1:6; Hab. 2:4). In this passage he also quotes the only passage in the

Septuagint that combines the words *law* and *curse* (Deut. 27:26). This is easily explicable if he had memorized Genesis, Deuteronomy, and Habakkuk. If he actually had to find every single use of these word combinations by turning scrolls, he and his assistants would have been at it for weeks if not months. The only reasonable explanation is memory. He did not wish to say in general that disobeying commandments brings a curse, but rather he wanted to connect “curse” with the word *nomos*, “law,” and his memory produced the only instance in his Scripture.

I discovered what Paul had done in these passages by studying Edwin Hatch and Henry Redpath’s concordance to the Septuagint. It took a few hours. Now, with the possibility of searching the LXX with a computer, it would take less time. I am confident, however, that Paul’s memory produced the right result faster than a computer could.

I think that memory is also responsible for the fact that a lot of Paul’s quotations are conflated. Staying just with Galatians 3, we note that Gal. 3:8, “all the Gentiles will be blessed in you,” conflates Gen. 12:3 with 18:18, while Gal. 3:10 borrows from Deut. 27:26 and 28:58. Once the memory has a key word, it will produce passages containing that word, and conflation is much more likely to be the result of memory than of turning through one or more scrolls and deliberately taking one word from one passage and a few words from another. Perhaps that is not so difficult if one conflates passages that are only a few turns of the scroll apart. But elsewhere Paul conflates Isaiah and Jeremiah, for example, which is much harder if one thinks of him as studiously rolling scrolls.

Paul had probably memorized the text of the Greek translation of Jewish Scripture. In the modern world, many people are taught not to memorize, but rather to learn how to look things up. Rote learning is often despised and is accused of preventing creativity.

Today, when we have easy access to reference books, conveniently indexed texts, CDs, websites, and Internet search engines, it is easy to undervalue the advantages of memorizing, which are considerable. In the ancient world, however, education necessarily included a great deal of memorization. Moreover, it was easier for a child to memorize a large amount of material than for adults to carry scrolls around and look things up.

I shall itemize four points that indicate the incentives for students in the ancient world to memorize: (1) Finding a passage in a large work was very difficult, since there was usually no system of division below the level of book (i.e., no chapter, paragraph, or verse numbers). (2) Books were still kept on scrolls, and it was harder to find the right scroll and the right page in a scroll than to find the right page in a bound volume. (3) Scrolls were less portable than bound volumes. (4) Scrolls were expensive. Thus ancient readers were forced to rely on their memories. They were also not as flooded with information as we are, so that memorization of what they read was more feasible. In time, the codex (bound volume) became widely available, and this eased the problem of finding specific passages; nevertheless, memorization was faster, and memorizing large quantities of material continued to play an important role in education until the twentieth century. “School” was synonymous with “memorization.” It was what boys did.

Christian scholars with whom I have discussed this usually regard massive memorization as being so difficult that it is not worth considering as a possibility. Jewish scholars, however, think that it is not only plausible but probable. Jewish scholars still live in a world in which a good rabbi can quote not only the Bible but many rabbinic passages as well. They are consequently better positioned to understand the ancient world.

I shall offer a kind of syllogism: Study resulted in memorization;

memorization led to quotation; therefore Paul had memorized what he quoted. We would all understand Paul much better if the words of the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures were running through our brains, as they were through his.

When thinking about memorization in the ancient world, however, we should not think of someone standing up and reciting every word of the Bible straight through. The point of studying and repeating texts time after time was to be able to recall a passage when one needed to use it. This is what Albert Baumgarten called “an art of investigation and retrieval.”⁶⁶ Paul’s brain could find texts that corresponded to the words and ideas that he needed when he needed them. Thus today a Shakespearean scholar might be unable to recite a single play by Shakespeare straight through, but could nevertheless complete more or less any passage if someone started it off or used one of its key words. By repeated reading and study one can know a text well enough to quote from it more or less accurately if the need arises.

In any case, the reader of Paul’s letters can readily see that he could quote passages from the Bible whenever he needed to do so. It is improbable that he paused during his dictation to take down scrolls and turn them, searching for the right place—even on the unlikely supposition that he carried the scrolls of the Bible with him during his travels. As I noted above, Paul’s memory was probably faster than a contemporary search engine in some cases, such as those cited above (Gal. 3:8, 10), because one is looking for two words in the same context—not right next to each other.

Thus I conclude that Paul had memorized the Septuagint—or, at a minimum, the parts of it from which he quotes (which excludes a few

66. My memory retrieved most of this discussion from something that I wrote five years ago. See Sanders, “Paul’s Jewishness,” in *Paul’s Jewish Matrix*, ed. Thomas G. Casey and Justin Taylor (Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2011), 54–59.

books). Trained Palestinian Pharisees could quote any biblical text in Hebrew, and it is probable that many other studious Jews, such as the Dead Sea sect, could do the same. It is highly likely that many zealous Jews in the Diaspora could quote any passage in the LXX.

Paul's childhood and youth were probably not much different from those of other Diaspora Jews. He acquired grammatically accurate Greek, he learned the contents of his Scripture, and he learned how to support himself. Some boys, from richer families, learned more elegant Greek and studied a lot of Greek and probably some Latin literature as well. Paul probably went to a school that did not teach Homer, Euripides, and so on; or possibly as soon as he had the basics he had to quit school in order to earn money.

Paul the Persecutor

Paul wrote that "as to zeal" he was a persecutor of the church (Phil. 3:6). From Paul's letters, we have no direct information about why, how, when, and where he persecuted Jewish followers of Jesus. With regard to "where," we do, however, have a strong lead. In Paul's account of his "earlier life in Judaism" (Gal. 1:13-17), he seems to have been in Damascus at the time of his conversion experience. In any case, we may assume that he persecuted Jewish Christians in the area where he grew up: Syria and Cilicia, which were the regions where later he conducted his first missionary activity (Gal. 1:21-23).

We are totally ignorant about the period of his activities as persecutor—when he began and how long he continued. This pursuit ended, obviously, when he was converted to support the cause that he had once vehemently opposed.

We can do a little better with regard to "why" and "how." We shall consider "why," however, when we reach the chapter on 1 Thessalonians, because reading Paul's letter will provide a lot of help

for an exploration of the reasons for which Paul and other non-Christian Jews opposed and wished to punish Jewish Christians.

This leaves us with “how”: what did he *do* to them? There is a very useful clue in Paul’s descriptions of his own sufferings as an apostle: “Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one” (2 Cor. 11:24). As persecutor, he probably did to others precisely what was later done to him.

The “thirty-nine stripes,” as this punishment is usually called, was probably the only way a Jewish community outside of Judea had of punishing wayward members—except ostracism. In some of the cities of the Diaspora—those in **Senatorial provinces**—Roman magistrates enforced Roman law, and they could order beating with rods, imprisonment (both of which Paul also suffered: 2 Cor. 11:23, 25), or, after a trial, execution. A Jewish synagogue in one of the cities of Asia Minor, Macedonia, or Greece, however, could not execute or imprison; in fact, it could inflict on a member only a punishment that the member accepted. If someone who was born a Jew wanted to dissociate himself from Judaism, and if he then worshipped a pagan god, there was nothing that the synagogue could do. The apostate could simply appeal to the officials of his city or to the governor for protection. The members of the synagogue could not drag him off the street and flog him.

Since Christians were persecuted in Jerusalem, I should explain that there the legal situation was quite different. A Roman administrator (sometimes called a prefect, sometimes a procurator) was nominally in charge of Judea, but in **imperial provinces**, such as Judea, there were no Roman magistrates. The Romans, instead, governed very indirectly, and local administration of justice (though not the death penalty) was entrusted to local leaders. In the case of Jerusalem, the day-to-day administration of justice was the job of the Jewish high priest and his council.

The New Testament depicts this situation perfectly accurately. In his mission field, Paul and his colleagues were sometimes taken before Roman magistrates, as in Philippi (Acts 16:19–24). In Jerusalem, however, the high priest and his council arrested, imprisoned, flogged, and harassed the followers of Jesus (see especially Acts 4:1–22; 5:17–42). We know from Josephus that in the year 62, when there was temporarily no procurator resident in Judea, the Sadducean high priest Ananus convened a court and had James the brother of Jesus and some others executed. This was against the laws that governed Roman imperial provinces, and Ananus was deposed (*Antiq.* 20.200–203). These passages reveal the legal situation: even in Judea, the powers of the high priest were limited and did not include execution. He could, however, arrest, try, and flog people who seemed to him to be disruptive or dangerous.

Thus if Paul was active as a persecutor anywhere but Judea, he was probably traveling from one synagogue to another, denouncing those who had accepted Jesus, and recommending that the local synagogue should punish the offenders, either by ostracism or by flogging.

It is quite common to associate Paul's role as persecutor with his identification as a Pharisee, as if Pharisaism led him to persecution. That is not what he wrote. As we saw above, he was a Pharisee "as to the law." That is, he accepted Pharisaic views. That is one topic. The next is that "as to zeal" he was a persecutor of the church (Phil. 3:5f.); that is, he was so exceptionally zealous that he even persecuted the Christian movement. It appears that what he was doing was quite atypical; we should not imagine Pharisees in Palestine coaching their students on how to become full-time traveling persecutors. On the contrary, most Pharisees were farmers or small merchants, tied to their land or business.

I shall take up here a topic that I mentioned above: Pharisees were

lenient in judgment, whereas the Sadducees were known as brutal judges.

According to Josephus, the Pharisees were “naturally lenient in the matter of punishments” (*Antiq.* 13.294). The Sadducees were “indeed more heartless than any of the other Jews . . . when they sit in judgment” (*Antiq.* 20.199). This description of the Pharisees is supported by the remarkable leniency of the Mishnah, which is a collection of legal opinions of the early rabbis, who were the heirs of the Pharisees after the fall of the temple (70 CE). I shall quote a learned scholar:

The Mishnah tractate *Sanhedrin*, which deals with courts and offences, especially those for which the Bible prescribes death, is remarkably lenient. . . . Not only does it require more elaborate procedures before declaring for guilt than for innocence; not only does it state that the court may reverse itself in favor of acquittal, but not in favor of guilt; not only does divided testimony lead to an acquittal: the tractate also requires judges to ask witnesses whether or not they warned the accused in advance (*M. Sanhedrin* 5.1). *Sanhedrin* and the following tractate *Makkot* (“Stripes”), which discusses cases for which the penalty was thirty-nine lashes, contain so many rules requiring accusations to be thrown out of court that it is difficult to imagine a conviction.⁶⁷

The New Testament largely supports this view. It was the high priest and his council who sought Jesus’ life; the Pharisees, as far as we know, were not involved. They are not mentioned in connection with the arrest and trial in Matthew, Mark or Luke.⁶⁸

After Jesus’ death, according to Acts, it was the high priest “and all who were with him [that is, *the sect of the Sadducees*]” who acted against the apostles (Acts 5:17, my emphasis). The leading Pharisee on

67. Sanders, *Practice and Belief*, 20.

68. The New Testament depicts the Pharisees as being opposed to Jesus and even as plotting to lead him into a verbal trap (Matt. 22:15), but in the Synoptic Gospels they do not appear during the arrest and trial of Jesus. “The Pharisees in the Gospels,” however, is too large a topic to discuss here.

the council, Gamaliel, spoke on behalf of leniency and persuaded the council to act accordingly (that is, the apostles were only flogged, not sent to Pilate for execution; Acts 5:33–40). And, as we noted above, the Sadducean high priest Ananus later executed James the brother of Jesus (*Antiq.* 20.200–203).

The evidence about the persecution of both Jesus himself and his followers in Jerusalem uniformly indicates that the persecutors were the high priest, the chief priests, and other aristocrats, who were certainly not Pharisees and who, if they were members of one of the parties, were Sadducees. Thus Paul was a Pharisee and was also a persecutor, but there was no link between the two.

A final remark on “zeal.” We noted above that most Jews were zealous to maintain their obedience to the Bible and to their own customs and way of life. They stood out in this respect. Most groups in the Roman Empire were willing to fit into the Greco-Roman world by accepting Greek culture and Roman power. The Jews went along to a degree, but even so they resisted assimilation. In Alexandria, Egypt, for example, we can discern three distinct groups, who had different customs and different rights: (1) the Macedonians, Greeks, and Romans, (2) the Jews, and (3) the native Egyptians. Some Jews wanted to be admitted to group (1), but Jews in general would not give up their distinctive characteristics: they insisted on worshipping only their own God; they ate only the food permitted by the Bible; they insisted on circumcision, although Greeks and Romans regarded it as mutilation; they required recognition of their right not to work or appear in a court of law on the Sabbath; they retained the right to send money to the temple in Jerusalem; and they would not support local temples. Above we noted the decrees at the time of both Julius Caesar and Augustus that gave them these and other rights. These concessions reveal the success of Jewish zeal.⁶⁹

Like the Amish in the United States, they simply would not give up their ancestral customs.

Josephus waxed eloquent about the Jews' zeal for their own customs, which led them to prefer to obey the divine law even when faced with death. They excelled even the Spartans in their loyalty: "We . . . never even in the direst extremity proved traitors to our laws"; we faced "death on behalf of our laws with a courage which no other nation can equal" (*Apion* 2.220-235, quotations from 228, 234). A sober reading of the history of the period shows that Josephus did not lie. "Zeal" was not distinctively Pharisaic; it was Jewish. Zeal, in Paul's opinion, was a virtue ("I can testify that they [the Jews] have a zeal for God," Rom. 10:2), but before his conversion he took it to such an extreme that it became a vice, an offense against God.

Summary of Paul's Pre-Christian Life

Most of the pages of this chapter have been dedicated to (a) the assessment of Acts as a source for information about Paul; (b) background information on the Greek-speaking Jewish Diaspora; (c) information about the Pharisees in Palestine, who are often discussed in connection with Paul.

We have also managed to obtain a little evidence about Paul's life before his conversion. We wish that we had a lot more information about him, but I think that I have extracted as much knowledge as possible from the meager evidence. Despite lack of detail, we can be sure of some major points:

1. Paul was born into a Jewish family in the Greek-speaking Diaspora that remained observant to a fairly high degree: for example, he was circumcised on the eighth day. In accord with

69. See the summary of Josephus, *Antiq.* 14.213-264 in Sanders, *Practice and Belief*, 211f.; cf. *Antiq.* 16.44-46, 160-73.

this, we may assume that he also kept the Sabbath, ate kosher food, and fasted on the Day of Atonement—and so on.

2. As a boy he learned a trade and could support himself by working with his hands.
3. Presumably in school he learned grammatically proper Greek and was fluent in the language.
4. Also presumably in school, he learned the contents of the Jewish Scripture in Greek “backward and forward.”
5. He held opinions that allowed him to identify himself as a Pharisee “as to the law.”
6. At some point in adulthood he began persecuting Jews who accepted Jesus as Lord and Christ. This persecution probably consisted of going to synagogues and denouncing such people, recommending that they receive the thirty-nine stripes. This degree of zeal was a personal, individual trait. It is not to be connected with any known part of his background, and it certainly was not a general characteristic of Pharisees.

Paul the Apostle of Christ to the Gentiles

In this chapter we shall deal with Paul's conversion (though, as we shall see, the word is in dispute), the title "apostle," his earliest missionary activity, his conception of his mission, and some aspects of his missionary technique. First, however, comes a very brief description of the Jerusalem church at the time of Paul's conversion. I shall limit this to the bare minimum required to explain the Pauline letters.

The Church in Jerusalem

Jesus of Nazareth, who lived during (approximately) the first thirty years of the Common Era (CE), was an eschatological prophet, a healer, and a teacher, especially of ethics. He proclaimed the coming of the kingdom of God, which he expected soon, and he taught people how to live in light of the coming kingdom. He gathered disciples, who followed him during his preaching and teaching mission in Galilee. Three of these disciples constituted an inner circle: James and John, the sons of Zebedee, and Simon bar Jonah, who is

featured as the leading disciple. Jesus nicknamed Simon “Rock” or “Rockie.”

The Aramaic word for rock was *Kepha*, and the Greek translation was *Petros*. Since the New Testament was written in Greek, Simon bar Jonah is known as Petros (“Peter” in English), though Paul and doubtless others sometimes called him by his Aramaic nickname, Kephas, which became “Cephas” in English (note “Peter” in Gal. 2:8 and “Cephas” in Gal. 2:11; “Cephas translated Peter” in John 1:42; “Simon called Peter” in Matt. 4:18 and elsewhere).

These three disciples were, in the Gospel narratives, the only witnesses to Jesus’ “transformation” (Mark 9:2 // Matt. 17:1), and only they accompanied him to the Garden of Gethsemane, where he prayed before his arrest and execution (Mark 14:23 // Matt. 26:37). Moreover, they are almost the only disciples who are given speaking roles in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). All of the disciples accompanied Jesus to Jerusalem, where he overthrew some tables in the temple. This is probably the act that most alarmed the government, led by the high priest Caiaphas. Jesus was interrogated by the high priest and his council, and they recommended his execution to Pontius Pilate, the Roman procurator, who at that time was the only person in Jewish Palestine who could order an execution.

After Jesus’ execution, his tomb was found empty. The disciples fled to Galilee, where he appeared to them (promised in Mark 14:28; reported in Matt. 28:16–20). They returned to Jerusalem and began the activities that led to Christianity. They tried to get their fellow Jews to repent of their sins and to believe in Jesus and in his return. They constituted a small group, or movement, within Judaism. The movement was **eschatological**, since they expected Jesus to return and establish the kingdom of God on earth.

We cannot quantify their success, but it was substantial enough

that they attracted attention and even suffered some persecution (see immediately below). We do not know what happened to most of the disciples. Some may have gone on missionary journeys, and there are a lot of legends about their fates.

Peter and the two sons of Zebedee (James and John) doubtless led the Christian movement during its first years after Jesus' execution. During the very earliest days of the movement, the chief priests and the Sadducees conducted a persecution of the followers of Jesus (Acts 5:17). Gamaliel, the leader of the other main party, the Pharisees, spoke in favor of leaving the followers of Jesus in peace (Acts 5:34). The persecution in any case was not thorough. The leaders of the new movement lived through it.

When Claudius became emperor of Rome (41 CE), he changed the government of Jewish Palestine. One of Herod's grandsons, Agrippa I, had assisted Claudius on his way to his grand position, and Claudius restored the Herodian line by appointing Agrippa I as ruler of Judea. Agrippa I, for reasons we do not know, ordered the execution of James, one of the sons of Zebedee (c. 44 CE). This was accompanied by the arrest of Peter, but he was soon free (Acts 12:1-11). This left Peter and John as leaders of the movement.

Another James, however, joined the leadership: James the brother of the Lord.¹ He is mentioned in Acts 12:17 and becomes a major figure in Acts 15 (see, e.g., 15:13-21). At an apostolic conference, Paul recognizes Peter, John, and James the brother of the Lord as "pillars" of the movement (Gal. 2:9).

Paul coincidentally explains the fact that James the brother of Jesus became a major figure in the movement: the risen Jesus appeared to James (1 Cor. 15:7). James thus had the same basis to be a Christian

1. Several people named James are mentioned in the Gospels and Acts, which can cause confusion. This brief sketch deals with only James the son of Zebedee and James the brother of the Lord. For fuller information about people named "James," see Donald A. Hagner, "James," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:616-18.

leader as did Paul (see “The Title ‘Apostle,’” pp. 99f.). James, like Paul, had a private revelation of the risen Lord.

Many people are surprised that Jesus had a brother, though the New Testament is clear on the fact. In Matt. 13:55, Jesus’ brothers are James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas; Mark 6:3 has the same names in a slightly different order; Luke 8:19 mentions Jesus’ brothers; Paul calls James “the brother of the Lord” (Gal. 1:19).

In Acts 15, it is James the brother of the Lord who decides how to handle the problem raised by the question of whether or not gentile converts should be circumcised (15:19–21). And in Gal. 2:11–12 it is James who sends a message to Peter that leads him to stop eating with gentile converts to Christianity.

On Paul’s first journey to Jerusalem, he met only Peter and James (Gal. 1:18–20). Later, when he went to Antioch for a meeting over the gentile question, he states that James and Cephas (Peter) and John were “acknowledged pillars” of the movement (Gal. 2:9). Peter was still “*the* apostle to the circumcised” (Gal. 2:7), but James seems to have become the principal decision maker.

Paul’s Conversion and First Apostolic Efforts: The Evidence of the Letters

In describing his revelatory experience, Paul wrote only that “God revealed his Son to me” (Gal. 1:16). Elsewhere he claimed to have seen the risen Lord (1 Cor. 9:1). He considered this to be a resurrection appearance: “last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me” (1 Cor. 15:8). This appearance of the risen Lord meant that Paul was the equal of the original apostles—as least as he saw the matter (1 Cor. 9:5–8). He modestly says that he was “least of the apostles,” “unfit to be called an apostle,” because he had persecuted the Christians. But in fact he considered himself to be at least the equal of the other apostles (Gal. 2:9–12; 2 Cor. 11:21–23).

God revealed his Son to Paul so that he could carry out a specific mission: his call was not just to serve Christ, but rather to accomplish a special task— “to preach him among the Gentiles” (Gal. 1:15-16). This was then his whole activity for the next twenty or so years.

He tells us more about what he did and especially what he did *not* do after he saw the Lord: “I did not confer with any human being, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but I went away at once into Arabia and afterwards I returned to Damascus” (Gal. 1:16-17). In the context of the argument of Galatians, these sentences are principally a denial that Paul received his gospel and apostleship from humans and that his authority was dependent on others. The denial is Paul’s response to attacks in which his gospel and his position were both called into question. The details of his fuller response will be deferred until we discuss Galatians. Here I shall consider a few questions regarding his biography: (1) Where was he at the time of his conversion? (2) Where did he go? That is, where is “Arabia” (Gal. 1:17)? (3) What did he do in Arabia? (4) How long did he stay?

Where was Paul at the Time of his Conversion?

In the previous chapter I proposed that Paul was probably in Damascus at the time of his conversion experience, rather than on the way to Damascus (as Acts has it). That is the simplest construal of his statement that after he went into Arabia he “returned to Damascus.” If one wishes to think that he was on the road to Damascus, however, no harm is done. At any rate, he reached Damascus and from there he went to Arabia. He does not explain what he did there, though below I shall offer some speculations.

Where did Paul Then Go?

We can explore where “Arabia” was. I shall do this briefly. In first-century Greek, “Arabia” could refer to any one of three places, which I list beginning in the south and moving north: the Arabian Peninsula, now called “Saudi Arabia” (Arabia α). A second possibility appears in Gal. 4:25, “Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia,” in which case “Arabia” is the Sinai desert (Arabia β).² Finally, “Arabia” might mean “those lands occupied and governed by the Nabatean Arabs” (Arabia γ). In this case, Arabia is the land south of Damascus and east of the Jordan River, running down to Petra and then on to the Gulf of Aqaba—land now in Syria and Jordan.

We may dismiss the possibility that Paul went to Arabia (α), the Arabian Peninsula. Two others lay much closer to hand. J. B. Lightfoot, while noting all the possibilities, preferred Arabia (β), the Sinai desert. He was attracted by Paul’s placing the giving of the law in this “Arabia” (Gal. 4:25), and he thought that Paul would have gone there to contemplate “the true meaning and power of the law.”

Similarly, E. deWitt Burton (1856–1925) proposed that Paul needed “prolonged thought” in order “to see just how much of the old was to be abandoned, how much revised, how much retained unchanged.”³

J.B. Lightfoot (1828–89), a man of extraordinary learning, which he combined with a great deal of common sense, is my favorite among the older commentators on Paul. I cut my teeth as a student of the New Testament on Burton’s commentary on Galatians, which I admire greatly. Here I shall argue against these scholars because their position is based on a widespread view of Paul, one that I

2. J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians* (London and Cambridge: MacMillan and Co., 1865, 10th ed., 1890), 87–90.

3. Ernest deWitt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (New York: Scribner, 1920), 56. Paul needed to work out “a new system.”

regard as romantic but erroneous: the position is that Paul thought out the theology of Romans, especially the parts on the Jewish law, in advance of his missionary endeavors.

Scholars love to think of Paul as a scholar: he studied his scrolls of the Bible; he made notes; he came to conclusions; then, with a theology of the law, or “the old” (as Burton put it) in hand, he went to work converting gentiles to his “law-free” theology. I think that in part this view arises simply from the fact that Romans, as the longest letter, heads the Pauline canon, and people read it first. It feeds the desire of scholars to see Paul as primarily a thinker rather than a doer.

When we organize and read the letters in chronological order, however, we see that the problem of the Jewish law, as it applied to his gentile converts, does not appear in his early letters—1 Thessalonians, 1 Corinthians, and 2 Corinthians. That this was a serious and in fact monumental problem seems to have hit him hard and taken him by surprise at the time of his difficulties with the church in Galatia. Thereafter he struggled with it in Galatians, Philippians, and Romans.

One of the principal arguments of this book is that Paul did not work out a full theological system, and he certainly did not do so in advance of his career as apostle. The existence of such a system is called into doubt by his correspondence, where he seems to be making a lot of ad hoc, “on the spot” decisions. In 1 Thessalonians, for example, we see that he had not prepared his converts to anticipate their own death and resurrection, but rather had instructed them to wait for the return of the Lord. This view of the nearness of the end means that he did not need an entire new system. This applies especially to the question of how much of Judaism to keep. We shall see that he is attempting to work through this excruciatingly difficult question in Galatians and Romans, near the end of his ministry. Even in these letters he does not define precisely which parts of the Jewish

law are still valid and which should still be maintained. Thus it is most doubtful that he had sorted all this out twenty years earlier. My views will unfold in the course of the present book, and I shall not expand their presentation here.

In addition to the dubiousness of the view that Paul worked out a complete theology before he began his apostolic mission, there would have been practical problems in going to Mount Sinai and staying there while he pondered what to do about the Jewish law. Lightfoot often considered practical issues, but on this point he did not. If he had, he would have realized that going to the Sinai desert would have required a major expedition. From Damascus to the Dead Sea is about 200 miles (322 km), more than ten days hard walking, but more likely fifteen days; from the southern end of the Dead Sea to Mount Sinai is about 180 miles (c. 290 km) as the crow flies, more than nine days at least of hard and fast marching through the desert, which would more likely have required another twenty days.

The trip and the return journey would have been not only arduous but also dangerous, both because of bandits and because of the scarcity of food and water. The dangers required heavy expenses. Paul, an urbanite, would have needed camels, asses, guards, and a trustworthy guide, as well as food and water for both the men and the animals. During his apostleship, he had to support himself by working with his hands (1 Cor. 4:12). It is unlikely that immediately after his conversion he had the funds necessary for a long and hazardous trip, with all that such a trip implied in terms of assistants and supplies. A private caravan into the desert would have required private wealth.

It is much more likely that Paul went to the cities south of Damascus, including one or more of the cities of the **Decapolis**, all but one of which lies east of the Jordan. Thus we should accept the view of most modern scholars that Paul went to the kingdom of the

Nabateans (Arabia γ)⁴ south of Damascus and especially to the cities of the Decapolis in that region. In the cities he could have found work while he decided what to do next.

What Did Paul Do in Arabia?

The best answer is that we do not know. This does not, of course, stop speculation. The most common speculation is that he went to think and to meditate on the meaning of the revelatory experience, and, though he did not think up the theology of Romans, this is probably on the right track. The statement that he did not “confer with flesh and blood,” while principally aimed at refuting the idea that he received the contents of his gospel from another human (rather than being inspired directly by God), nudges the reader toward thinking that he sought isolation.

Thus I am not proposing that Paul did not think at all about the content of his message—just that he did not work out an entire new “system” and that he did not come out of Arabia with a firm doctrine about the Jewish law. He may well have taken the opportunity to study the Jewish Scripture and to see how it could illuminate his own life and how it could help him understand the lordship of Jesus. By “study,” I mean run through in his mind, since I doubt that he took the twenty or so heavy scrolls into Arabia and that he found a table at which to work.

Given the fact that Paul attributes his specific mission—conversion of gentiles—to his revelatory experience, he may very well have reflected on prophetic expectations of the conversion of gentiles that one finds in the Jewish Scriptures: that in “days to come” gentiles will turn to worship the God of Israel (Isa. 2:2–4 and elsewhere).⁵ This is

4. J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 170.

5. On the prophetic predictions, see more fully below, at the end of chap. 22.

an attractive possibility, since it goes along with the observation that what he *had* to do was to decide what to do next.

It seems reasonable to think that in Arabia Paul thought of doing what he in fact did: preaching to gentiles that they should worship the God of Israel, who had sent his Son to save the world, and that they should wait for the return of the Son, which would be in the near future. When we discuss 1 Thessalonians (chap. 9), I shall give a list of the contents of Paul's "simple gospel," and it may be that he brought this with him out of Arabia. We cannot know whether or not he tried his hand at converting gentiles in the Greek-speaking cities of the Decapolis.

How Long Did Paul Stay in Arabia?

According to Galatians, Paul returned to Damascus from Arabia and then "after three years" he went up to Jerusalem "to visit Cephas" (Simon Peter), staying with him about fifteen days (Gal. 1:17-18). During this visit he also met James the Lord's brother (Gal. 1:19). Since in 1:16 he writes that he "immediately did not confer with flesh and blood" ("immediately" has dropped out of the NRSV, and it is misplaced in the NIV), the inference is that it was three years or more (allowing for some time in Arabia) after his conversion that he first sought contact with the Christian leaders in Jerusalem.

How long was three years? In most cases of counting years that I have observed in ancient literature, the count is *inclusive*, which means that "three years" could have been as little as two years in our terms. For example, ancient authors regarded the Olympic Games as coming every *five* years, not every four, though we are discussing the same period of time. (The Summer Olympics were held in 2008 and 2012, which we call "every four years." To the ancient Greeks, this would have been every *five* years: 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, and 2012

are five years.) If Paul was speaking precisely, then, he could have meant the period from (let us say) 33 to 35 CE. It is even conceivable that “three years” could have been shorter: one day of year 33, all of 34, one day of 35. Worse, he could have been using “three” as a round number, meaning “a short number of years.” Thus we cannot know how long he was in Arabia, just as we do not know how long he was in Damascus (“I went away at once into Arabia, and afterwards I returned to Damascus,” 1:17). He could have been in Arabia for a year, followed by a few months in Damascus. A leisurely trip to Jerusalem then might have brought him to that city “three years” after his conversion.

Following his trip to Jerusalem, Paul “went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia” (Gal. 1:21). That exhausts our knowledge of this missionary endeavor. It is worth recalling, however, that his terminology refers to geographical regions, not Roman provinces, since at the time eastern Cilicia was in the province of Syria. It is most unlikely that he preached in the difficult and dangerous region of western Cilicia, home of pirates and very rugged terrain.

Thus going into the regions of Syria and Cilicia meant going to some parts of Syria that were not Damascus and then to his home territory in eastern Cilicia. Unless he had tried to convert gentiles in the Decapolis, his trip into other parts of Syria and Cilicia was his first missionary activity. To this trip he attaches a comment on his relationship with the church in Jerusalem: “I was still unknown by Christ to the churches in Judea that are in Christ; they only heard it said, ‘The one who formerly was persecuting us is now proclaiming the faith he once tried to destroy’” (Gal. 1:22-23).

Paul's Conversion: The Evidence of Acts

Acts has Paul describe the revelation as a bright light (rather than seeing the Lord, which was Paul's view). In Acts, there are three accounts of the revelation to Paul and its aftermath, and it is informative to consider them all. This examination will tell us a lot about Acts and little about Paul, but this is useful knowledge.

The first account, in Acts 9, is narrated by the author of the book and refers to Paul in the third person; the next two, in Acts 22 and 26, are accounts attributed to Paul and are in the first person. The narratives may be divided into parts: a statement of the occasion, the revelation, and the aftermath, including in each case a trip to Jerusalem. We begin with the first two elements. According to Acts 9:1–30, Paul was in Jerusalem, where he was very well known to the Christians. He went to the high priest and asked for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that he could arrest, bind, and extradite those who were “followers of the Way.”

As he was . . . approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” He asked, “Who are you, Lord?” The reply came, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.” The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. (Acts 9:3–7)

The passage continues by saying that Paul was unable to see; the others led him to Damascus, where he stayed for three days without sight, eating and drinking nothing.

According to the second account, Acts 22:3–29, Paul received letters from the high priest and “the whole council of elders” for the same purpose as in Acts 9. This is the description of the revelation:

While I was on my way and approaching Damascus, about noon a great

light from heaven suddenly shone about me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” I answered, “Who are you, Lord?” Then he said to me, “I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting.” Now those who were with me saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me. I asked, “What am I to do, Lord?” The Lord said to me, “Get up and go to Damascus; there you will be told everything that has been assigned to you to do.” (22:6–10)

As in the previous passage, Paul was unable to see, and so his companions led him to Damascus.

According to the third passage, Acts 26:9–20, also attributed to Paul, he was authorized by the chief priests to punish Christians in synagogues in Jerusalem, and he tried to force them to blaspheme. “I pursued them even to foreign cities.” His account continues:

With this in mind, I was traveling to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, when at midday along the road . . . I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and my companions. When we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It hurts you to kick against the goads.” I asked, “Who are you, Lord?” The Lord answered, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But get up and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and testify to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you. I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light. . . .” (26:12–18)

The third passage does not include the information about Paul’s blindness.

In all three passages, Paul sees a light rather than Jesus; we recall that he was certain that he had seen the Lord. A memory of this may appear in Acts 26:16, in which the risen Jesus says to him, “I have

appeared to you . . . testify to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you.”

In the first account, Paul’s companions heard the voice but saw no one. In the second, they saw the light but did not hear the voice. The third also implies that they saw the light (they fell to the ground before Paul heard the voice). The third passage is unique in that the announcement of Paul’s future mission to the gentiles is part of the initial revelation (“to whom I am sending you,” 26:18).

The continuations of the three passages are more distinctive. According to Acts 9:10–30, the Lord told Ananias in a vision to find Paul. When he did, Paul was healed and immediately began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues of Damascus. The Jews plotted Paul’s death; his followers helped him escape the city by lowering him in a basket through an opening in the city wall. He went to Jerusalem and tried to join the disciples of Jesus, but they were afraid of him. Barnabas took matters in hand and secured his acceptance. Paul then spoke in the Greek-speaking synagogues of Jerusalem, but his life was in danger, and so the disciples sent him to Tarsus.

In Acts 22:12–21, Ananias found Paul and told him to regain his sight, and his sight was restored. Ananias then announced Paul’s future mission (to be Jesus’ “witness to all the world”). Paul was baptized and then returned to Jerusalem. He was praying in the temple and had a vision of Jesus, who warned him to flee “because they will not accept your testimony about me.” Paul recounted his own attacks on the Christians. Jesus replied by saying, “I will send you far away to the Gentiles.”

In Acts 26:19f, after recounting his vision, which included the mission charge, Paul merely states that he “declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout the countryside of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God and do deeds consistent with repentance.”

Perhaps most striking is the second account, Acts 22, in which Paul has a vision of Jesus while he is praying in the temple; in this vision, Jesus warns him to escape because those in Jerusalem will not accept his testimony (rather than because his life is in danger), and then repeats the mission charge. It is most remarkable that this vision does not appear in the first account, which is quite detailed and also quite different. In Acts 9, the events in Jerusalem are Paul's acceptance by the disciples, Barnabas's role, and the threat to Paul's life. None of these are repeated in the other accounts.

We should also recall that the first and third versions, according to which Paul was active in the Christian community in Jerusalem immediately after his first vision, stand in bold contradiction to Paul's statements that he first met Peter and James three years after his conversion but remained "unknown by sight to the churches of Judea" (Gal. 1:22).

The simplest explanation of this disagreement is the "Jerusalem-centric" character of Luke and Acts, which we discussed above. Acts and Paul also contradict each other on a second point: according to Paul, he was let down from the city wall because he was being sought by the Nabatean governor (2 Cor. 11:32). In Acts 9:23-5, he escapes *the Jews*, who have decided to kill him. As we saw above, the explanation is that in Acts "the Jews" are almost always the opponents of Paul's mission, and gentile governors and magistrates always clear him of any Jewish charge against him (pp. 16-17).

I have presented these stories at such length, however, because they provide an excellent example of my previous explanation of historical narrative in the ancient world (pp. 14-15). Most of us in the modern world have an ideal of what historical narrative should be: it should be a statement of facts. In reality, of course, "facts" are processed by human minds, which means that no two observers will ever represent a complicated series of events in precisely the same way. I do not

mean that human reporting is more fancy than fact, but that “the bare facts” are extremely elusive even in our world, where we have the ideal of discovering them. Ancient authors were well aware of the difference between truth and fiction, fantasy and reality. They did not, however, have the ideal of “the bare facts,” nor did they idealize “the literal truth.” All ancient historians knew that in order to make a story flow they had to engage in creative writing, and they did it with no hesitation. They described the characters in their stories as doing the things, and especially saying the things that were appropriate to themselves and to the overall historical situation. Moreover, they all had views of how things should have happened, such as that Paul should have lived his life prior to his conversion in Jerusalem.

It is equally noteworthy that Luke, like every other ancient author, liked *variety* and did not regard inconsistency or even contradiction as a terrible fault. The reader who wishes to believe whatever is in Acts will not be able to say whether or not Jesus *really* revealed Paul’s mission to the gentiles at the time of the first revelation or later. Luke simply varied the story. Similarly, in two of the stories of Paul’s vision, his companions saw the light but did not hear the voice, while in the third, they heard the voice but did not see the light.

In the same way, Luke varied the accounts of Jesus’ resurrection appearances in Luke 24 and Acts 1:1–5. The reader of the Gospel of Luke, for example, would think that all the appearances took place on the same day, but according to Acts 1:3, Jesus’ appearances spanned forty days. The author probably did not change his mind, and it is doubtful that he received new information. He simply varied his accounts, and he did the same thing in describing Paul’s conversion and his call to be apostle to the gentiles.

The Title “Apostle”

Before we leave Acts and resume our study of Paul’s call, I wish to highlight a somewhat surprising issue. One of the problems that faced the author of Acts was whether or not Paul, the hero of his work, should be called an “apostle.” Luke had a theory of apostleship: there could be only twelve—no more, no fewer, and these twelve must have been followers of Jesus. He makes one clear exception to the rule in the story of the election of Matthias as the twelfth apostle, replacing Judas (Acts 1:15–26).

In the narrative of Acts, the author seems to have been reluctant to think of Paul as an apostle. He does call Paul and Barnabas “apostles” in 14:4, 14, but usually they are distinguished from the apostles, as in 9:27; 15:2, 4, 6, 22; 16:4.

Paul insisted that he was an apostle and had really *seen* Jesus: “Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?” (1 Cor. 9:1–5). In 1 Cor. 15:7, he equates his vision of the Lord with the disciples’ seeing the risen Jesus, even though it was late: “as to one untimely born” (15:8). Paul’s second proof for his apostleship consisted of the results of his work: “Are you not my work in the Lord? If I am not an apostle to others, at least I am to you” (1 Cor. 9:2); “The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, signs and wonders and miracles” (2 Cor. 12:12–13).

The defensive character of some of these statements (“at least I am to you”) may show that there was some doubt that Paul was actually on the same plane as Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, James and John, who had been Jesus’ disciples. My guess (and it is only a guess) is that there actually was some qualification for apostleship that Paul lacked—possibly that he had not been a disciple.

Thus it is quite reasonable to think that Luke was not the only person who thought that “apostles” should previously have been

followers of Jesus. We shall see in Galatians that Paul's enemies doubted his status, and the Corinthians also had some doubts after they were visited by other apostles. The controversy over Paul's apostleship may help explain why, in the stories of Paul's conversion in Acts, Paul sees only a light. He subsequently has a vision of Jesus (Acts 22:18), but for some reason Luke was keen to limit what he saw when he was first called.

Finally, to complete our study of the use of the word *apostle*, we should look at Paul's list of Jesus' resurrection appearances before he appeared to Paul: "He appeared to Cephas [Peter], then to the twelve. He appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time. . . . Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles" (1 Cor. 15:5-7). The distinction of "the twelve" from "all the apostles" seems to hint at a wider use of the term "apostle" than Luke's. Since Paul does not explain, we cannot guess what a broader use of the term "apostle" might signify.

Moreover, Paul calls his opponents in Corinth "apostles," though they are false apostles (2 Cor. 11). I suppose that they could have been disciples of Jesus, but Paul says that they had "letters of recommendation," which seems to exclude the possibility that they were apostles in Luke's sense, originally followers of Jesus.

It seems that opinion about the use of the word *apostle* was not unanimous. Certainly some people held the view that the title should be strictly limited (e.g., the original twelve plus Paul), but we also see that sometimes the title was applied loosely to other emissaries of the Christian movement.

Paul's Conversion and Call: The Evidence of the Letters

Our best evidence for Paul's call is what Paul himself wrote. He does not give many details, but only the key points: God revealed his son

to him, so that he “might proclaim him among the Gentiles” (Gal. 1:16).

Moreover, as we just saw, in Paul’s view, his vision of Jesus counted as a *resurrection appearance* (1 Cor. 15:8). On the basis of it, and the success of his apostleship, he was duly qualified as an apostle (1 Cor. 9:1), and he was also able to attempt a description of the resurrection *body* (1 Cor. 15:35–55). This seems to mean that he did not view his vision of Jesus as a dream-like apparition, nor as a bright light, but as a real appearance of the risen Lord.

We shall consider Paul’s view of the resurrection body extensively below (chaps. 14 and 15), and in the next section we shall consider Paul’s activity as an apostle. Here there is one final question: should we speak of Paul’s *conversion and call*, or only of his *call* to be an apostle? That is, is “conversion” correct?

Paul’s career as apostle would be devoted to the conversion of gentiles. Here the word *conversion* is quite correct, since he wanted gentiles to *turn* “to God from idols, to serve a living and true God,” as well as to “wait for his Son from heaven” (1 Thess. 1:9–10). Paul himself did not *turn* to another God; he continued to worship the God of Israel. He also continued to believe in the election of Israel (Rom. 9:1–4), and he continued to think that Jewish Scripture contained the revelation of God (pp. 674–75).

The debate over whether or not Paul “converted” is actually a debate about the meaning of the word *conversion*. If it means “turn *from* the worship of one god *to* the worship of another,” then Paul did not convert. If it means “turn from one set of religious practices to another set,” then one could argue that Paul partially converted, since in order to win gentiles he sometimes gave up some Jewish practices, and he expected other Jewish Christian apostles to do the same (1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 1:11–14).

But if by “conversion” we mean not “turn from,” but only “turn to,” then we may say that Paul converted.⁶ He turned to a new revelation from the God of Israel, a revelation that transformed the old in a fairly radical way: “whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over the minds [of non-Christian Jews]; but when one *turns to* the Lord, the veil is removed” (2 Cor. 3:16). My own inclination is to use “convert” in the third way—turn to—and consequently to speak of Paul’s conversion, but I would not wish to fight to the death over this usage. What is most important is for us to understand the subject matter.

Apostle to the Gentiles

When Paul wrote his last surviving letter, Romans, he had a clearly formulated view of his mission and activity: he was apostle to the gentiles, not the only one (as we shall see), but, in his own view, the preeminent one, appointed to this position by Christ. I am not inclined to challenge his self-assessment.

When he wrote Romans, he was in Corinth and was about to begin the arduous journey back to Jerusalem, in order to take to “the poor among the saints” (the Jerusalem Christians) money that he had collected from his gentile churches, as well as representative gentile converts (Rom. 15:25–26; for the traveling companions, see 2 Cor. 8:16–24). After delivering the offering, he planned to travel west again, stopping at Rome before continuing on to Spain (Rom. 15:23–24, 28). His mind was partly on what awaited him in Jerusalem: possible confrontation with “unbelievers in Judea” (non-Christian Jews) and possible rejection by the Christian community, probably because of hostility from “false brothers” (Gal. 2:4) who had previously opposed him. He sought the prayers of the church

6. The Greek verb translated “turn to” is *epistrephô*, which occurs in 1 Thess. 1:9; 2 Cor. 3:16; and Gal 4:9 (the Galatians are again “turning to” their former deities, called the *stoicheia*).

members in Rome to aid him in both of these potential struggles. They should pray that he would be “rescued from the unbelievers in Judea” and also that his “ministry to Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints” (Rom. 15:30f.).

His mind was also on his past achievements and, especially, conflicts, including serious conflicts with other Jewish Christians regarding his mission and authority (see the chapters on Galatians and the Corinthian correspondence). In this mood he wrote an explanation of his career. He was the one who would fulfill the expectations of the prophets—which was also, in his opinion, one of the main purposes for which God sent Jesus: the conversion of gentiles to worship the one true God, the God of Israel. The aim of Paul’s mission had been to “bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles . . . including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ” (Rom. 1:5–6). He was obligated to both classifications of gentiles: Greeks and barbarians (non-Greeks, 1:14). His self-definition is clearest in Romans 11: “Inasmuch then as I am apostle to the Gentiles, I glorify my ministry in order to make my own people jealous, and thus save some of them” (11:13).

This remarkable theme, that Paul would save some of Israel indirectly, and that Jews would be brought to Christ because of the gentile mission, appears twice more in Romans: 11:25–26 (the full number of gentiles will come in and *thus* all Israel will be saved) and 11:30–31 (by means of the mercy shown to you gentiles, now also they, the Jews, will receive mercy). Paul was here reversing God’s plan as it had always been thought of. The standard expectation, that Israel would be restored and *then* gentiles added (see immediately below), had not been fulfilled. Peter, James, and John, the chief apostles to the circumcised (Gal. 2:6–10) had been relatively unsuccessful. God had led Paul through Asia Minor and Greece “in triumph,” and had used him to spread “the fragrance of the

knowledge of [God] everywhere” (2 Cor. 2:14), but Peter had been less successful. God’s plan, however, would not be frustrated, but rather fulfilled in another way. Paul’s very success would make Jews jealous, and so they would join; and thus he, Paul, would indirectly contribute to the salvation of Israel. That, at least, is how Paul saw it near the end of his mission.

There are further statements of Paul’s vocation in Romans 15, and it is here that he ties his mission to the purpose for which Jesus was sent. Christ himself was “a servant to the circumcised” partly to redeem God’s promises to the patriarchs, but partly in order to bring the gentiles to glorify the God of Israel (15:8-9). He, Paul, is the one who is seeing to this. He is “a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles,” carrying out “a priestly ministry” in the service of the gospel of God, in order that “the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable” (15:16). Only about this will he speak: what God has done through him “to win obedience from the Gentiles” (15:18).

Nothing could be clearer: Paul thought of himself as emissary to the gentiles, but we also see that he thought of himself in this way within a given context: a context both in history and, more important, in the plan of God, who sent his Son partly in order to bring in the gentiles. Further, Paul, in doing it, was fulfilling a priestly ministry: he was bringing an offering to Jerusalem. We know from what worldview, or view of saving history, that comes. It is the long-held Jewish expectation that, in the final days, gentiles would come to worship the God of Israel. They would come bearing gifts—or offerings—and they would come bringing themselves to serve God. This is one-half of a standard Jewish expectation about the end: God would first restore Israel, and then gentiles would come

in.⁷ In Romans 15, Paul quotes a series of passages from the Jewish Scripture that express hope for inclusion of the gentiles:

- “I will praise you among the gentiles.” (Rom. 15:9; Ps. 18:49)
- “Rejoice, O gentiles, with his people.” (Rom. 15:10; Deut. 37:43 LXX)
- “Praise the Lord, all gentiles.” (Rom. 15:11; Ps. 117:1)
- “In the root of Jesse shall the gentiles hope.” (Rom. 15:12; Isa. 11:1, 10 LXX)

Paul saw himself as the agent of this, the second half of the divine plan. His job description was thus *apostle to the gentiles in the Messianic era*.

The sharp limitation of Paul’s mission to the gentiles appears also in Galatians. When God revealed his Son to Paul, he did so in order that Paul would “proclaim him among the Gentiles” (Gal. 1:16). In chapter 2, Paul relates that, on his second trip to Jerusalem, “false brothers” tried to force one of his gentile assistants to be circumcised (2:3–5). After this crisis, he and the Jerusalem leaders, James, Peter, and John, came to an agreement. The Jerusalem apostles realized that God had sent Paul to the uncircumcised just as he had entrusted Peter with the gospel for the circumcised.

And when James and Cephas and John, who were acknowledged pillars, recognized the grace that had been given to me, they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. They asked only one thing, that we remember the poor, which was actually what I was eager to do. (2:7–10)

7. See, for example, Isa. 2:2–4; 56:6–8; 66:18–24. See further E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief* (London: SCM, 1992), 290–92.

It is possible that the limitation of Paul's mission became clear in his own mind only as a result of the crisis in Jerusalem and its aftermath, a further crisis in Galatia, when some Christians wanted to force Paul's gentile converts there to be circumcised. Before he wrote Galatians, Paul had written this about his apostleship:

To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the [Jewish] law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. (1 Cor. 9:20-22)

The reader of this passage would not suspect that Paul strictly limited his mission to gentiles and that he gave himself only an indirect role in the salvation of Jews. It sounds as if he actively tried to win them. Acts depicts Paul as systematically going first to the synagogue whenever he entered a new city and preaching there (Acts 13:5; 13:14; 14:1; 17:1-5, esp. v. 2; he went to the synagogue "as was his custom"; 17:10; 17:17; 18:4; 18:19; 19:8). He was, however, rejected by all or all but a very few, and only then did he turn to gentiles. This is part of the description of Paul's attempt to win the Jews of Antioch in Pisidia:

Then both Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you [the Jews]. Since you reject it and judge yourselves to be unworthy of eternal life, we are now turning to the Gentiles. . . ." When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and praised the word of the Lord; and as many as had been destined for eternal life became believers. Thus the word of the Lord spread throughout the region. (Acts 13:46-49)

There is a similar passage in 18:6.

In view of Acts and 1 Cor. 9:20-22, we must investigate the question of Paul's missionary intentions and efforts more closely. Did he, as Romans and Galatians state, preach almost exclusively to gentiles, or, as 1 Cor. 9:20-22 implies, try to win both Jews and gentiles, or, as Acts strongly maintains, attempt to win Jews until he gave up, at which point he turned to gentiles?

There is no disagreement about the results. Acts agrees with Romans that Paul succeeded only among gentiles; the narrative is punctuated with frequent comments on this success (Acts 14:27; 15:3, 12; 17:26; 21:19), which complement the passages about his failure among Jews.

It is more striking, however, that Acts also knows the view that Paul's mission *from the beginning* was to the gentiles.⁸ This appears in two of the passages on Paul's conversion that we discussed above. According to Acts 22:21, when Jesus appeared to Paul in the temple, shortly after his conversion, he told Paul that he would "send [him] far away to the Gentiles." In the third account of Paul's conversion, Jesus promises to rescue Paul from "your people" and also "from the Gentiles," adding "to whom I am sending you" (that is, to the Gentiles, 26:17). After this passage, however, Paul states that he preached in Damascus, Jerusalem, and the countryside of Judea, "and also to the Gentiles" (26:20). We have seen reason to doubt that, immediately after his conversion, Paul preached in Jerusalem and the rest of Judea, because of his own statement that he was not known by sight in Judea (Gal. 1:22). Acts 26:17 seems to reflect the fact that Paul was, throughout his career, an apostle to gentiles, while Acts 26:20 is the author's attempt to have Paul be a failed apostle to the Jews, prior to his successful turn toward the gentiles.

There are three further considerations before we can reach a

8. See Best in *NTS* 1984, 1-3.

decision on the difficult question of Paul's conception of his mission. The first is that Paul's descriptions of his converts, both before and after he wrote Galatians, uniformly indicate that they had been pagans. His converts in Thessalonica "turned to God from idols" (1 Thess. 1:9); prior to their conversion, the Galatians worshipped "beings that by nature are not gods" (Gal. 4:8). The Corinthians had been "led astray to idols that could not speak" (1 Cor. 12:2). Paul knew Jewish Christians in the Diaspora, but the principal ones, Andronicus and Junia (or Julia),⁹ he identifies as not his converts (Rom. 16:7). Apollos (1 Cor. 1:12; Acts 18:24 and elsewhere) was probably Jewish but was not Paul's convert, though their paths crossed in Corinth. The same is true of Prisca and Aquila (1 Cor. 16:19; Rom. 16:3f.; Acts 18:2f. and elsewhere). One other Jew is named in Romans 16:11 (Herodian), but we do not know whether or not Paul converted him.¹⁰

As Johannes Munck and some other scholars have seen,¹¹ there is virtually no trace, in any of Paul's letters, of Jews who were Paul's converts.¹² This point is compatible with either view of Paul's mission: he had very, very few Jews in his churches, if any, either because his mission was to gentiles (Romans and Galatians) or because it was to Diaspora Jews, among whom he was amazingly unsuccessful (Acts).

The second point is that in none of Paul's letters to his own churches (that is, excluding Rome, which he did not found) does he

9. Whether "Junia" or "Julia," in any case it is the name of a woman, presumably the wife of Andronicus. In many texts and translations, including the NIV, the name is given as Junias in an attempt to make it a masculine name. See the explanation below, p. 139.

10. On these and other figures who appear in Paul's letters, see the discussion of Romans 16, pp. 138–40 below.

11. Johannes Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind* (London: SCM, 1959), 200–209.

12. In Rom. 16:21 Paul associates Timothy and three "compatriots"—that is, Jews—with himself in the sending of the letter, which may have been originally sent to some city other than Rome (see the next chapter). These men—Lucius, Jason, and Sossipater—may or may not have been Paul's converts.

refer to the questions of internal church practice that would have arisen if they had contained both Jews and gentiles: what to do when some people eat kosher and some do not, some observe the Sabbath and some do not. He does refer to these as internal problems in Romans, which was written to a church founded by someone else (Rom. 14:1–9). He discusses the problems of food and Sabbath in Galatians, to be sure, but there he is not dealing with a problem of internal unity between his own Jewish and gentile converts. Rather, all of his converts, who are depicted as gentiles and former pagans (Gal. 4:8), were being persuaded to adopt the Jewish law by outsiders.

The final consideration is this. As we saw above, in Romans 9–11 Paul gives himself only an indirect role in the salvation of Israel. Jews, seeing the success of the gentile mission, would be jealous and join (Rom. 11:13f.). It appears from Romans 9–11 that Paul had not previously fully confronted the Jewish rejection of the gospel, and for the first time he was trying to think through what it meant. He finally concluded, we saw, that Jewish rejection meant that the order of salvation would be reversed: instead of first the Jew then the gentile, it would be first the gentile then (through jealousy) the Jew.

Had he previously been repeatedly turned down by Jews, one would have expected to hear of it earlier. In his earliest letter, 1 Thessalonians, he roundly condemns Jews, but not for rejecting his message. He writes, rather, that they hinder him “from speaking to the Gentiles that they may be saved” (1 Thess. 2:16).

The version of Paul’s career that appears in Acts (he was apostle to Greek-speaking Jews and turned to gentiles only when his intended converts rejected him), if strictly true, would require us to suppose that in such passages as 1 Thess. 2:16 and Romans 11 (just cited), Paul was dissembling, covering up his own massive failure either by blaming the Jews, not for rejecting him, but for hindering his mission to gentiles, or by giving himself only an indirect role in the mission

to Israel. Romans 11 is, in effect, a refutation of the view that he systematically tried to save Jews before turning to gentiles.

As usual, faced with an unresolvable contradiction between Paul's letters and Acts' account of his career, I choose the former: Paul was always apostle to the gentiles.

In this case, however, what is the meaning of 1 Cor. 9:20-22, where he presents himself as trying to win both Jews and gentiles? This passage, the only direct statement that Paul makes in favor of a dual mission, cannot represent precisely what he did. He states that he followed the Jewish law in order to win Jews *and* that in order to win gentiles he disregarded the Jewish law. But it is impossible to follow the law and not follow it at the same time and in the same place. Two aspects of the Jewish law would immediately and regularly require a choice between obedience and disobedience: food and Sabbath. One cannot simultaneously eat kosher food and non-kosher food, nor simultaneously observe the Sabbath and work on it. There is no hint anywhere that in each city Paul commuted between mission fields, some weeks keeping kosher and observing the Sabbath around Jews, other weeks living like a gentile among gentiles. Therefore 1 Cor. 9:20-22 cannot be a practical description of his behavior, but is rather a description of his mental readiness to fit in with present company, whatever it might be.

The best way to think of Paul's mission is to grant that he felt himself called to be "apostle to the Gentiles" (1 Thess. 2:16; Gal. 1:16; 2:7-10; Rom. 11 and 15; Acts 22:21; 26:17). This means that he did not preach exclusively to Jews in synagogues until he gave up in despair. Rather, he set up shop in a market area (see pp. 112-13 below) and spoke to whoever came in, attempting especially to convince gentiles to accept the God of Israel and Jesus as his Son. He also regularly or at least sometimes attended synagogues, where he invited Jews to accept Jesus as Messiah. He was sometimes so

insistent that he was punished with the thirty-nine lashes (2 Cor. 11:24). His focus was on gentiles, but he would have been more than pleased to win Jews as well.

Perhaps he did not win Jews because of the simple fact that he lived as a “renegade” Jew, consorting with gentiles and eating non-kosher food. There seems to me to be no doubt that in his mission field Paul *usually* lived as a gentile in order to win gentiles. He attended synagogue at least sometimes, as his punishments prove, but he was basically apostle to the gentiles, and he disregarded the parts of the Jewish law that separated Jew from gentile in the Diaspora (see further chaps. 17–18 on Galatians).

That does not prove that there were no Jewish converts in Paul’s churches. There may have been some; if so, they presumably lived like gentiles, as did Paul himself. This would have resulted in the effect that we observe in his letters: Jewish converts are almost entirely invisible. Yet even so it is hard to think that Paul considered himself primarily as did the author of Acts—apostle to the Jews of the Diaspora. He thought of himself as apostle to the gentiles.

The question of who, if anyone, was commissioned to preach to the Jews of the Diaspora remains one of the more difficult ones of early church history. It cannot be pursued here, but we may note that there were numerous other traveling evangelists. We have already seen some of their names, especially Barnabas and Apollos, and Paul also refers to the travels of “the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas” (1 Cor. 9:5). It was not expected that Paul would do everything, and we know from 2 Corinthians 11 that other Jewish-Christian apostles sometimes worked in cities that Paul regarded as his own.

Missionary Technique

How did Paul go about approaching gentiles? Acts shows that direct

address to people in public places was possible. It depicts Paul, in Athens, as speaking in the market place and entering into debate with some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers (Acts 17:17-18). Whether or not Paul did this in Athens, the description of this technique shows that it was plausible. There were market squares (*agorai*), people did gather in them, and philosophical discussion was held.

Another very valuable suggestion has been made by Ronald Hock, which builds on the fact that Paul at least sometimes supported himself by working with his hands.¹³ While converting gentiles in Thessalonica, Paul worked “night and day” so as not to burden the young congregation with his upkeep (1 Thess. 2:9). According to 1 Cor. 4:12, he grew weary from working with his own hands. We shall consider the economic circumstances of his mission below. Just now we note, following Hock, that Paul’s trade could be combined with his work as apostle. He was a “tentmaker” (Acts 18:3) and probably worked with leather, making durable tents for travelers who wished to and could afford to avoid inns and their vermin. If he could make tents of leather, he could doubtless make other leather goods as well. He could enter a city, find a small workplace to rent, perhaps including sleeping quarters, hang out his sign, and begin to attract trade. If he worked long and hard each day, he could support himself. We must assume that his assistants, with whom he traveled, could do the same.¹⁴

While he worked, he could talk, since leather work is not noisy. If he were found to have something interesting to say, people would

13. Ronald Hock, *The Social Context of Paul’s Ministry: Tentmaking and Apostleship* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980).

14. The other principal view of Paul’s trade is that he worked with wool, and especially with *cilicium*, named for the region from which he came (Cilicia). This was a coarse cloth made of goat hair; “cilice” and “cilicious” are fairly rare words in English, but they refer to what is otherwise called “haircloth” or “sackcloth”—coarse wool suitable to penitence (see the *OED*, s.v. “cilice”). It is more difficult to conceive of a traveling weaver than of a traveling leather worker, and on this and other grounds I prefer Hock’s proposal. For this debate, see *ibid.*, 20f.

drop in from time to time to talk and listen. It is very probable that in this way Paul did a lot of his evangelistic work. If he actually paid 100 percent of his own expenses from his manual labor, he would not have had much time for the leisurely philosophical discussion depicted in Acts, both when he debates with pagan philosophers in the market square (Acts 17:17-34, cited above), and when he argues daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus in Ephesus (19:9). According to some important manuscripts, these debates lasted from eleven o'clock to four o'clock each day.

In favor of Hock's view of how Paul gained a hearing with gentiles, besides the fact that earning his living would consume most of his waking hours, we should add that Paul was apparently a poor public speaker. This became an issue in Corinth. Paul, in Ephesus, learned that the Corinthians were being unduly influenced (as he saw it) by Apollos, which led to a lengthy rebuke of the Corinthians, coupled with a justification of his own apostolic merits (1 Cor. 1-4). One of the main topics is "wisdom," and especially the fact that Paul (unlike Apollos) could not speak "with eloquent wisdom" (1:17), "lofty words of wisdom" (2:1), or "plausible words of wisdom" (2:4). He claims, however, that "among the mature we do speak wisdom," though it is not a wisdom of this world, but rather God's secret wisdom (2:6-7). This is Paul's self-justification: he has *real* wisdom, though not the sort that leads to eloquent speech. Later, after he had been to Corinth to try to re-establish his authority, he returned to the topic: his enemies said that "his letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible" (2 Cor. 10:10). It is probable, however, that in small groups, or one-to-one, his intensity, passion, and complete conviction carried the day.

Whether addressing large crowds, as in Acts, or a few people gathered around his work place, as suggested by Hock, what did Paul

say that was interesting enough to attract a following of people who wanted to hear more, some of whom converted to Christianity?

In order to get us into the substance of his letters sooner rather than later, I shall here give a brief account of Paul's message.

One way of looking at his gospel is to consider the ways in which it was either improbable or attractive to many gentiles. He wanted them to give up their own gods of long standing and to believe in the Jewish God, and, further, to believe that this God had a Son who would save everyone who accepted him. People had grown up worshipping the gods of their cities, enjoying this worship, and feeling that they benefitted from it.

As we noted above, most ancient religions, including those of Greece and Rome, were collective in nature, focused on the deities' protection of the city, tribe, or nation, rather than on individual salvation. In Paul's day, eastern cults of salvation, sometimes called "mystery religions," had begun to penetrate the Roman Empire. Some scholars have made the quest for individual salvation a main aspect of pagan religion in the Roman Empire at the time of Paul.

It now appears that this interest has been greatly exaggerated. The vast number of gentiles in the empire stayed true to the old religions and did not dabble in the new and exotic religions. Ramsay MacMullen observed that "assurances of immortality prove unexpectedly hard to find in the evidence."¹⁵ It was not a major topic of concern in the Roman world in Paul's day.

We shall treat Paul and paganism more fully when we discuss 1 Thessalonians, and here I shall make only one more point: paganism was *fun*. In addition to religious holidays and festivals, the modern

15. See Ramsay MacMullen's decisive rejection of the older view in *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981), 53. For the rejected view, see Franz Cumont, *Astrology and Religion among the Greeks and Romans* (New York: Dover, 1960); Cumont, *Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism* (Chicago: Open Court Publications, 1911); Cumont, *The Mysteries of Mithra* (New York: Dover, 1956).

world has invented secular and semi-secular festivals, but in earlier days all festivals were religious. Festivals in the cities of the Greco-Roman world included parades, often games (athletic contests), and feasts, featuring red meat from the sacrifices. Paul wanted gentiles to give up their native traditions, which offered them the principal relief from the drudgery of life, in order to worship a rather austere God, who was identified with a peculiar people called Jews, and thereby to give up not only their accustomed worship, but also many civic and social activities.

Paul's beliefs that Jesus was God's Son, that he had lived and died, and that he would soon return from heaven to save those who believed in him were not as intrinsically improbable as various modern cults, such as the Heaven's Gate cult, have seemed to most of us today. Even people who believe in life on other planets find it difficult to accept the view that a spaceship from another world is hiding behind the Hale-Bopp comet and will beam cult members up if they kill themselves.¹⁶ Christianity was not *that* improbable to first-century citizens of the Greco-Roman world. Greek mythology had accustomed people to the view that a god could sire human offspring, and thus saying that Jesus was "the Son of God" was not intrinsically impossible. There is no precise parallel to Jesus' ascent to heaven and final return in Homer, but the general idea of a god's ability to take on human form and engage in earthly activities made the Christian view less difficult for Greeks than for Jews. The biggest hurdle for Paul's converts was the rejection of their own rich religious and civic activities. Why would they give these things up? Moreover, why should gentiles accept the word of a wandering, ill-clad evangelist who was not even a gifted speaker?

16. On March 26, 1997, thirty-nine bodies of people who had belonged to the Heaven's Gate cult were found in San Diego, California. They had thought that they would join an alien craft that they believed to be near the Hale-Bopp comet.

There were, however, some things in Paul's favor. In the first place, there were partial precedents. Not every teacher was well-dressed and meticulously groomed. The Cynics scorned material possessions and were famous for being ill-dressed wandering teachers. Thus, even if their clothes were shabby, Paul and his companions did not look like men from Mars, but rather fitted into a social niche. Nor was the preaching of a religion from the East unheard of. The numerical success of Asian cults in Roman and Hellenistic cities may have been overestimated in the past,¹⁷ but there were numerous such cults. Judaism itself was a well-known religion, and a new movement within it might have held interest for many. Pagans often looked at Judaism with scorn, but it had its admirers. Monotheism was philosophically appealing, and Judaism's high ethics were attractive.

A long-standing theory of Paul's missionary success is that he won to his cause gentiles who had already become worshippers of the God of Israel. These gentiles presumably renounced idolatry, prayed to God, and attended a synagogue, but did not convert to Judaism. Though this has been challenged, I think that there probably were such people in Paul's world.¹⁸ Acts refers several times to "worshippers [of God]" (*sebomenoi*): 13:43, 50; 16:14; 17:4, 17; 18:7, 13; 19:27. Josephus also refers to "worshippers of God" who were distinct from Jews (*Antiq.* 14.110).¹⁹ There is archaeological evidence for gentile supporters of a synagogue a few centuries later.²⁰ Moreover, as I just

17. See n. 15 above.

18. For an opposing view, see Thomas Kraabel and R. S. MacLennan, "The God-Fearers—a Literary and Theological Invention?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 12 (1986): 46–53, 64.

19. These gentile worshippers of God who did not convert to Judaism have usually been called "God-fearers." There is a Greek word for "God-fearer" (*theophobos*), but as far as I can tell it is not used in reference to gentiles who worshipped God. The NRSV translates *sebomenos*, the word in Acts and Josephus, as "devout" or "worshipper of God," without "fearer". This is correct. The NIV translates in both of those ways but in one case uses "God fearing." The JB also uses all three translations. Translating the same word in different ways, of course, makes a student's life harder.

20. J. Reynolds and R. Tannenbaum, "Jews and Godfearers at Aphrodisias," *Cambridge Philological Society Supplement* 12 (1987).

suggested, it is intrinsically likely that Jewish monotheism attracted some gentiles.

Although I think it to be very likely that before Paul's mission there were gentiles in Asia Minor and Greece who worshipped the God of Israel, I am by no means sure that such people constituted a significant number of Paul's converts. There is no evidence within Paul's letters that his converts had been "worshippers of God" and some evidence against it. When he characterized the religion of his converts before they turned to the one true God, he described them as having been idolaters (1 Thess. 1:9; Gal. 4:8-9).

This is one of those interesting questions that we are not able to answer decisively. Fortunately, we do not need to answer it in order to understand what Paul preached and what he wrote.

The message that Paul delivered to the gentiles, which included the promise of ultimate salvation, would capture the interest of numerous hearers. Many would have heard quite gladly the message that, by being baptized and professing faith in Christ, they would be assured of eternal life. The general attitude was often the more gods and the more religions, the merrier—or, at least, the more gods, the better chance of happiness—and it seems not to have been difficult to get a sizable number of people to increase their chances of a happy future by joining religions or cults.

The principal difficulty that Paul faced (as indicated above) was exclusivism—the elimination of pagan activities from his converts' lives. We learn in 1 Corinthians that not all the converts wanted totally to exclude participation in some of the aspects of the common paganism, and we must imagine that many more refused to join the Christian movement because it, like other forms of Judaism, would not tolerate the worship of other gods. Paul may not have emphasized at first the exclusivism that he shared with other Jews, and

the opening message of Jesus' death and resurrection—to which Paul could personally testify—would have captured interest.

Nevertheless, we must recognize that Paul converted a very small percentage of the pagans in whose cities he established congregations. Christianity would have to grow another hundred years or so before it was viewed as a real rival to paganism. To most gentiles, Christianity continued to seem improbable and unattractive when compared to pagan worship and festivals.

Paul's Message

We know with a good deal of precision what Paul preached, at least in outline. In the surviving letters Paul often recalls what he had said when he founded the congregation to which he is writing. He preached the death, resurrection, and lordship of Jesus Christ, and he proclaimed that faith in him guaranteed a share in his life. Writing to the Galatians, he recalled that he had placarded before their eyes Jesus Christ as crucified (Gal. 3:1), and he recalled for the Corinthians that he had known nothing among them “except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2).

The resurrection was also of primary importance. This is the earliest surviving summary of a Christian sermon, written to Thessalonica in Macedonia possibly as early as 41 CE, and no later than 51 CE, thus no more than twenty years after Jesus' death:

[Others] report concerning us what a welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come. (1 Thess. 1:9-10)

In addition to the death and resurrection of Christ, Paul offered hearers the promise that God would raise believers from the dead.

For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through

Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Thess. 4:14–18)

Jesus' death was not considered a defeat, but was for the believers' benefit, as this passage shows:

Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith. (Rom. 3:23–25)²¹

In these and many other passages we see the emphasis of the Christian message: (1) God had sent his Son; (2) he suffered and died by crucifixion for the benefit of humanity; (3) he was raised and was now in heaven; (4) he would soon return; and (5) those who belonged to him would live with him forever.

Paul's gospel, like that of others, also included the admonition to live by the highest ethical and moral standards: "May your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:23).

The sermons attributed to the apostles in Acts agree very closely with what we learn from the letters about Paul's basic missionary

21. I have chosen this passage as the only example in this book of probably pre-Pauline traditions. The concentration of words that Paul used rarely or not at all requires some explanation. The words are *haima* (blood); *hilastērion* (something that expiates), and *apolytrōsis* (ransom or redemption). The point is simply to indicate for advanced students that Paul sometimes revised earlier theological formulas and that this is a field of study. On Rom. 3:25–26 as pre-Pauline, see Ben F. Meyer, "The Pre-Pauline Formula in Rom. 3.25–26a," *New Testament Studies* 29 (1983): 198–208.

message. Acts contains several sermons attributed to Peter, Jesus' chief disciple and later the chief apostle. This is the best short example:

Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. But God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death. . . . This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear. (Acts 2:22-24, 32-33).

“This which you see and hear” refers to the fact that the disciples spoke in tongues, a charismatic gift that they attributed to the Spirit.

In this sermon, besides the reference to the Spirit, we see another important point, one that is of the greatest relevance for understanding the development of the Gospels. Jesus was “attested to you by God with mighty works.” Here we see the seed that would grow into the great tree of the Gospels: it became necessary to tell of Jesus' deeds, including especially his miracles.

Paul, however, has very little to say about the life of Jesus. He occasionally quotes his words (as he seems to do in 1 Thess. 4:15-18, speaking of “the word of the Lord”). The only other teachings that he quotes are (a) the prohibition of divorce (1 Cor. 7:10-11; see also Matt. 5:31-32; Luke 16:18; Matt. 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-12); and (b) Jesus' words at the Last Supper (1 Cor. 11:23-25; see also Mark 14:22-25 and parallels). Of his deeds Paul says no word, at least not in the surviving correspondence. Paul's message was focused on *God's* action in sending his Son for the salvation of the world and in raising him. This, Paul and the others held, assured believers that they would share his life.

Modern people may have a difficult time seeing how believable

this was to many ancient people. If we now heard the proclamation of resurrection, the first questions would probably be: How do you know he was really dead? What was the resurrection like? What form did it take? At least the second of these questions came up in Paul's ministry. He replies to it in 1 Cor. 15:36–50. His answer is that the resurrection is of a spiritual body, not a physical body, not “flesh and blood.”

The first question in the ancient world, however, where most people believed that the human soul was immortal, seems to have been, “How do we know that God raised *this* man and appointed him Lord?” In response to this question, whether expressed or implied, Paul testified to his own vision of the risen Lord (1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8), and it is evident that some believed him and accepted Jesus as their savior.

Besides this simple message, Paul also performed miracles that accredited him as a true prophet or spokesman of God. He writes to the Thessalonians that “our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and the Holy Spirit . . .” (1 Thess. 1:5). The word translated “power” is *dynamis* (from which we get “dynamite”), “mighty deed,” often with the meaning “miracle.” When the Corinthians, inspired by other apostles, doubted that Paul was a true apostle, or at least a good one, he reminded them that he had done the “signs” (*sēmeia*) of a true apostle, including “signs and wonders” (*terata*) and “mighty works” (*dynameis*) (2 Cor. 12:12). Some of his converts could also do *dynameis*, and they had charismatic gifts (*charismata*: Gal. 3:5; 1 Cor. 1:7; 7:7; 12:1, 4, 10–11, 28–29). These gifts included speaking in tongues, interpreting them, and healing (e.g., 1 Cor. 12:1, 10, 28), but for the most part “miracles,” *dynameis*, are unspecified (e.g., 1 Cor. 12:28). Paul was prepared, however, to challenge his rebellious church in Corinth, where some members

claimed *power*, and to assert that he would come there and demonstrate his own:

Some are arrogant as though I were not coming to you. But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power. What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod or with love in a spirit of gentleness? (1 Cor. 4:19-21)

We would love to know what these powers were that Paul had at his disposal. We know that he could speak in tongues “more than you all” (1 Cor. 14:18), and he saw visions (2 Cor. 12:2-4, 7). Acts depicts him as healing and exorcizing (Acts 16:16-18; 19:11-12), and even as raising the dead (20:7-12), but Paul describes none of his own miracles. That he did things counted in the ancient world as miracles, however, need not be doubted.

It is more impressive that, even when pressed for signs of his apostolic authority, he appealed more to “weakness” than to miracles, and more to the results of his missionary work than to his prowess. In the midst of assuring the Corinthians that he had performed the mighty deeds expected of an apostle, he also wrote, “I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the *power* of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Cor. 12:9). As we noted above, Paul was not especially impressive in person (2 Cor. 10:1), yet he was an effective missionary. He saw in this the power of God working through his own weakness. God said to him, “my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9), and the effectiveness of this power should have been evident: the existence of his congregations showed that he was a true apostle (2 Cor. 3:2-3). Despite this theological conversion of human weakness into a demonstration of the power of God, it seems that Paul in fact did more than simply preach (without much

skill!). He attracted attention and won followers, as had Jesus, by miracles—though in his case they are unspecified.

Travel, Letters, People, Money

Travel

Reading Paul's letters and Acts reveals a world in motion. Paul, his companions, and many other Christian missionaries traveled. It was not just the Christians: lots of people traveled. According to Acts, "Jews from Asia" roused the crowd in Jerusalem by accusing Paul of bringing a gentile into the temple (21:27f.). Jews from various countries around the Mediterranean, and also from Mesopotamia, traveled to Jerusalem for the pilgrimage festivals. Merchants, traders, magicians, and philosophers traveled. Frequency of travel depended on safety, and travel was safer in Paul's day than it would be again until fairly recent times.

Persia, at one time the largest empire in the world, had developed a marvelous system of roads on which patrols maintained security. The successive conquerors and rulers of Asia Minor and the Mideast had adopted the Persian system: Alexander the Great, the Hellenistic kings who were his successors, and Rome. Rome, of course, made its

own great contribution to roads and their security in the west, Asia Minor, and Syria.

There were, to be sure, brigands who preyed on those who traveled by road, especially in the mountains. The greatest security was poverty. In her study of *Travel in the First Century after Christ*, C. A. J. Skeel quotes Juvenal: *Cantabit vacuus coram viator*, “A traveler with empty pockets laughs in the face of a highwayman.”¹ But the Romans also tried very hard to suppress brigands and protect travel and trade, which were vital imperial interests. For example, Mark Antony turned over to Amyntas, the Galatian king, the suppression of robber tribes in the Pisidian mountains. After Amyntas died while engaged in this effort (25 BCE), Augustus turned his possessions into the Roman province of Galatia and carried on the pacification of the mountain tribes.² Trade along the Great Eastern Highway, which ran through Asia Minor south of the Salt Lake and the surrounding desert, flourished.³

Sea travel was also fairly safe.⁴ Rome had suppressed the pirates with great success,⁵ and in the Mediterranean, seafarers had to worry only about natural hazards. These were not negligible, but they no

1. *Sat.* 10.19–21. Cited by C. A. J. Skeel, *Travel in the First Century after Christ* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1901), 62. This is a remarkably interesting and useful little book, which Caroline Skeel based on a prize essay that she wrote while studying at Girton College, Cambridge. In her day, women could study at Cambridge and sit examinations, but they could not receive degrees. She obtained a double first in classics and a first in the historical tripos and went on to a productive and wide-ranging career at Westfield College, London, which has now become a constituent part of the University of London.
2. A. H. M. Jones, *Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 133–34; Skeel, *Travel in the First Century*, 122.
3. For the roads across Asia Minor, see appendix II below, pp. 767–68.
4. On ships, see Jean Rougé, *Ships and Fleets of the Ancient Mediterranean*, trans. Susan Frazer (1975; Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1981).
5. Pompey made a notable effort toward suppressing piracy, and Augustus established a permanent fleet for this purpose. “[A]fter the Roman emperors had secured control of the entire coastline of the Mediterranean . . . they were able to reduce piracy to a minimum.” Barbarian tribes weakened this control in the third century CE and piracy became a major problem again in the fifth century CE: Philip de Souza, “Piracy,” *OCD*3, 1184f. See also Skeel, *Travel in the First Century*, 97–99.

more prevented travel in the ancient Mediterranean than they did in, for example, the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans during the age of sails. Sailing, in fact, was less dangerous in Paul's time and place than in the oceans in most centuries because the ships were seldom out of sight of land, not in the unsearchable vastness of the ocean. Captains sailed cautiously, hugging the coast for maximum safety and as an aid to navigation.

According to Skeel, the account in Acts of Paul's voyage to Italy is "the fullest description we have of storm and shipwreck in the Mediterranean during the first century."⁶ The reader of Acts 27 notes numerous details, such as "undergirding" the ship (27:17)—that is, passing cables around the hull to hold the ship together. One also notes that they lost the cargo, the tackle, their food, and finally the entire ship, but they managed to get close enough to land that no lives were lost.

Even though being shipwrecked was less likely to be fatal in the ancient Mediterranean than in (for example) the seventeenth-century Atlantic, shipwrecks may have been more frequent. Both points are supported by Paul's statement that he had been shipwrecked three times before writing 2 Corinthians 11 (2 Cor. 11:25).

When in the mood to exalt his status as apostle by listing his sufferings, Paul depicted himself as "in danger from rivers, danger from bandits," "danger in the wilderness, danger at sea" (2 Cor. 11:26; this important passage is discussed more fully below, pp. 252–56). This may sound worse than it was. All these dangers existed, to be sure, but they still exist. Today we are in danger while driving, flying, sailing, walking, and so on. We carry on with our travels, for the most part not worrying about the various dangers. So did people in the ancient world. There is no way of knowing whether or not bandits then were worse and more numerous than muggers

6. *Ibid.*, 95.

and pickpockets today, but I am inclined to see these dangers as about the same. In the ancient world, as in the modern world, the danger varied from place to place. Crossing rivers is much less hazardous today than in the ancient world. Overall the dangers of travel were probably greater in Paul's world than today, but Paul and other ancient travelers accepted these dangers in the same way as we do today, simply as the normal hazards of life, which kept very few people from doing what they otherwise wanted to do.

Apart from the occasional dangers of the road, the worst aspect of travel was the low quality of inns. Vermin were all too common, and travelers who had friends and acquaintances along the way were fortunate. The prosperous traveled with their own tents. There is an amusing and enlightening account of inns in the *Acts of John*, an apocryphal narrative probably written in the third century. The work contains an account of a journey by the apostle John and others, during which they stopped at an inn. John lay on the bed in the room they engaged, while the others slept on the floor.

But when he lay down he was troubled by the bugs; and since they became more and more troublesome to him, and it was already midnight, he said to them in the hearing of us all, "I tell you, you bugs, to behave yourselves, one and all; you must leave your home for tonight and be quiet in one place and keep your distance from the servants of God."

This admonition was effective.⁷

Paul and his companions did not always have to suffer from vermin. They sometimes managed to stay in the home of a supporter or convert. Some of these also allowed congregations to meet in their houses. Gaius (in an unknown city) was host to Paul "and to the

7. *Acts of John* 60, in Edgar Hennecke and Wilhelm Schneemelcher, eds., *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. R. McL. Wilson (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963–66), 2:243f. On the date, see pp. 214f.

whole church” (Rom. 16:23). In the letter to Philemon, Paul requests that a guest room be prepared (v. 22), and this would have been his standard practice—whenever there was a convert whose house was large enough.

Yet, even with fairly secure roads, a good network of ferries and boats, and some hospitable houses along the way, travel was still arduous, dangerous, and difficult. Nevertheless, the early Christian movement depended on it, and the early Christians were just as intrepid as the traders, who gladly accepted the hazards and difficulties of travel in order to make handsome profits.

We do not hear of animals in Paul’s letters, though he and his companions may well have had a donkey to carry luggage and the tools of their trade. Probably they all walked. While soldiers might cover thirty miles (48 km) in a day, ordinary walking went at about half that pace or less.⁸ It is approximately 200 miles (about 325 km) from Ephesus to Philippi.⁹ Roughly the first half, Ephesus to Troas,

8. I assume that Paul and his companions walked, probably leading a pack animal, and that they could cover between twelve and fifteen miles per day. The following calculations are based on distance “as the crow flies”; since roads are not in fact straight, I am probably understating the travel times. Most information about travel comes from those who rode horses and led pack animals. Men riding in haste, but without being able to change horses every few miles, could cover thirty-two or so miles a day (about 51 km per day). Ordinary travel, with the horses and pack animals walking, covered about twenty-five miles per day. Those who traveled with full comforts covered less than twenty miles per day. See, for example, *The Travels of Marco Polo: The Complete Yule-Cordier Edition*, 1:89 n. 2. (The English translation with notes by Henry Yule was originally published in 1871; it was revised in 1875 and 1903. The third edition of 1903 was republished with additional notes by Henri Cordier in 1920 [repr. New York: Dover, 1993] in two volumes.) Riders who traveled post-haste, riding at full gallop from station to station, could of course travel much more rapidly. According to Yule (1:438 n. 7) the nineteenth century Turkish post from Constantinople (Istanbul) to Baghdad, 1,100 miles (1,774 km), required twenty days (55 mi/89 km per day). Marco Polo wrote that Kubla Khan’s post riders could travel 200 or 250 miles per day (322–403 km per day.) (*Marco Polo*, 1:436). This was also the distance per day covered by the Pony Express, which, beginning in April 1860, carried mail from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Sacramento, California (c. 2000 mi/3400 km) in eight days (250 mi/425 km per day.). The horses were stationed at intervals of 10–15 miles (16–24 km). See *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, 6th ed., p. 2270, s.v. pony express.

9. G. S. Duncan, citing Adolf Deissmann, estimated this trip as requiring 7–10 days (Duncan, *St. Paul’s Ephesian Ministry: A Reconstruction with Special Reference to the Ephesian Origin of the Imprisonment Epistles* [London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1929], 80–82). See chap. 21, n. 8.

would require about seven days on foot (100 miles at 15 mi. per day = 6.66 days; at the rate of 12 miles per day, 8.3 days); the boat to Philippi would require another three days. By land from Philippi to Corinth is approximately 250 miles (c. 400 km.), or another 17 to 21 days. Yet Paul and his companions took longer trips. The trip by land across Asia Minor from Antioch of Syria to Troas is about 900 miles (c. 1,450 km.): 60 to 75 days on foot. According to Acts, Paul made just this trip, crossing then into Macedonia and Greece (Acts 15:35–17:15, Antioch to Athens; cf. 18:22–20:2, Antioch to Greece). The letters show that he had churches along this route, and so we may be confident that it was a trip that he really made. Thus our schematic calculation, which does not allow for hard crossings of mountain ranges and the like, results in travel time of 80–99 days from Syrian Antioch to Corinth: 77–96 days by foot, three days by ship—over three months.

Paul, then, spent a substantial percentage of his apostolic career simply getting from one place to another.

It is of equal interest to note the way in which Paul, his aides, and his churches stayed in touch. The letters offer two outstanding examples of frequent communication by travel. One of these, trips to and from Corinth, we shall deal with just below; here we may note the trips between Paul and Philippi during one brief period in his life.

When Paul wrote Philippians, he was in prison, though we do not where. Acts reports only two substantial imprisonments, in Caesarea and Rome, both near the end of his life. But he had often been in prison (2 Cor. 11:23; cf. 2 Cor. 6:5), and some scholars propose a substantial imprisonment in Ephesus, partly based on an allusion to trouble there (he “fought with wild beasts” in Ephesus, 1 Cor. 15:32, taken to be a reference to human “wild beasts,” not to gladiatorial combat), but partly because of the trips that Paul mentions in his letter to the Philippians.¹⁰ From Phil. 2:19–30 and 4:18 we learn of

these trips: (1) news of Paul's imprisonment reached Philippi; (2) the church there sent Epaphroditus to Paul with aid; (3) Epaphroditus fell ill, and news of his illness reached Philippi; (4) Paul and Epaphroditus learned that the Philippians were concerned; (5) Paul sent Epaphroditus to them, presumably carrying the letter; (6) he would soon send his aide, Timothy. If he was imprisoned in Ephesus, and if our estimate above is accurate (that the trip from Ephesus to Philippi took nine days), his arrest touched off trips that together required forty-five days. Had he written Philippians while imprisoned in Rome, the total time spent in travel would have been several times as much. Everyone concerned, it is clear, took a good deal of effort to stay in touch, and this required, in one way or another, a lot of travel.

Paul and His Letters

Fortunately, Paul, the apostle to the gentiles in the Messianic era, wrote letters, and equally fortunately someone collected, edited, and published some of them. Modern readers can confirm for themselves that Paul's letters are "weighty and strong" (2 Cor. 10:10). The ones we have are for the most part concerned with substantial issues: behavior, belief, loyalty to Paul, and the like. Yet they are not all

10. Acts describes an overnight imprisonment in Philippi (16:19-34), but only two imprisonments are substantial enough to allow time for correspondence (Caesarea, chaps. 24-26, and Rome, chap. 28:16-31). It was once thought, therefore, that the prison epistles (Philippians and Philemon) must have been written in either Caesarea or Rome. The distances from either city to Philippi are so great, however, that the exchanges of correspondence seem to require an imprisonment nearer to Philippi. On the distances, see chap. 21 n. 8. Because 2 Corinthians, written before Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea, refers to previous imprisonments, it is easy to hypothesize that at least one of these was lengthy. The widely held hypothesis of an imprisonment in Ephesus originated with Adolf Deissmann (see *St. Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History*, 2nd ed., trans. W. E. Wilson [New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1926], 16-18, with a long bibliographic footnote). There is an excellent summary of arguments for and against this position in F. W. Beare, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians* (New York: Harper, 1959), 15-24, 39f. On the literary conventions of Acts' descriptions of the imprisonment of Paul and other apostles, see F. J. Foakes-Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, *The Beginnings of Christianity: The Acts of the Apostles*, repr. (London: Macmillan, 1979), 4:195-97. See further, chap. 21 and notes.

heavy theology. We often see a warm personal touch as well as charm, flattery, and persuasiveness. Paul, first a traveling persecutor and then a traveling apostle, was, as we saw, a full-time religious zealot.¹¹ It is useful to counterbalance this aspect of his personality by reading through the letters looking just for human warmth, love, and concern, as well as personal relationships and ploys intended to be persuasive. I give here a quick list of examples from the letters to churches:

- I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you, that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, yours and mine. (Rom. 1:11-12; cf. 15:14)
- I do not write this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. (1 Cor. 4:14-15)
- I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have made up for your absence, for they refreshed my spirit as well as yours. (1 Cor. 16:17)
- And besides our own comfort we rejoiced still more at the joy of Titus, because his mind has been set at rest by you all. For if I have expressed to him some pride in you, I was not put to shame; but just as everything we said to you was true, so our boasting before Titus has proved true. And his heart goes out all the more to you, as he remembers the obedience of you all, and the fear and trembling with which you received him. I rejoice, because I have perfect confidence in you. (2 Cor. 7:13b-16)
- . . . it was kind of you to share my trouble. And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving

11. Above, pp. 128-32.

and receiving except you only. . . . Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit which increases to your credit. . . . And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:14–19)

- . . . you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. (1 Thess. 1:7)
- Concerning love of the brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anyone write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another; and indeed you do love all the brothers and sisters throughout Macedonia. (1 Thess. 4:9f.)

One short letter—Philemon—and one part of a letter, which appears in Romans 16, show Paul the letter writer at his best. Paul may not have sent the letter to Rome but to another church, in which case the editor of the letters attached it at the end of Romans. Many have proposed that it was part of a letter to Ephesus.¹²

Whatever its destination, Romans 16 is a note introducing Phoebe, a minister of the church at Cenchreae, near Corinth. Paul warmly recommends her, asking that the church to which she travels “help her in whatever she may require” (Rom. 16:2). We then get a remarkable list of names that throw great light on the Pauline mission. We return to these below (pp. 138–40). Just now we note that Paul stayed in touch with and sent greetings to many church members.

The supreme example of Paul’s charm is the letter to Philemon. Philemon’s slave, Onesimus, had run away and had gone to Paul in prison (again, we do not know where). Paul writes to Philemon, praising him for his love and faith, his sharing that faith with others, and his material assistance to Paul and “the saints” (4–7). He asks that

12. See below, p. 156.

Philemon take Onesimus back without punishment, charging any costs or losses to his own (Paul's) account, which he undertakes to pay—though he reminds Philemon that he owes him his own life (17–19).

But, as John Knox has shown, Paul wants more.¹³ “I would have been glad to keep him with me . . . but I preferred to do nothing without your consent” (13–14). Paul closes, expressing confidence in Philemon's obedience. “I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say” (21). Paul, that is, wants Philemon to release Onesimus to Paul's own service, and he puts his request with some indirection, surrounded by appeals to Philemon's generosity and his incalculable debt to Paul.

Letters and Assistants

When there were troubles in one of Paul's churches he either wrote letters or sent assistants or both—and he sometimes did both even when there was no trouble, just to provide reassurance and support. Thus he sent both a letter and Timothy to Philippi (see above). He seems to have written to Galatia without sending anyone, however, and it may be that the problems there coincided with difficulties in Corinth, which taxed his own and his assistants' energies.¹⁴ The Corinthian correspondence best reveals how he made use of both letters and personal emissaries.

Of recent years there has been a partial return to the view that the Corinthian correspondence was written in the order in which we now find it, but the arguments in favor of reconstructing the correspondence, and putting 2 Corinthians 10–13 before 2 Corinthians 1–7, are still persuasive to me. One notes especially that in 2 Cor. 12:14 Paul threatens a third visit, while in 2 Cor.

13. John Knox, *Philemon among the Letters of Paul*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1959), 22–25.

14. See chap. 15 n. 6.

1:15–21 and 2:1 he explains why he did not make it. Thus chapter 12 should be placed before chapters 1 and 2. The editor of Paul's correspondence, on any reading of the evidence, put parts of various letters together and omitted parts of others. If we assume the reconstruction of the history of Paul's dealings with Corinth that I shall propose in chapter 9, we see that the information about the Corinthian congregation, which he received while he was in Ephesus, touched off the following trips and letters: Paul traveled from Ephesus to Corinth, from there to Troas, and then to Macedonia. Timothy and Titus both made trips to Corinth, and during the Corinthian crisis Paul wrote and sent four letters. Paul's mission required a lot of contact between him and his converts.

People

We have just seen the use of aides, and here I give more detail. Timothy, apparently Paul's favorite, seems also to have been with him longest. Along with Silas, he is associated with Paul in the sending of his earliest extant letter, 1 Thessalonians (see 1:1). To the Philippians Paul wrote that he had "no one like him." The others "all look after their own interests," but Timothy served Christ—and also Paul—"as a son with a father" (Phil. 2:19–24). In 1 Corinthians, Paul recommends Timothy as his "beloved and faithful child in the Lord" who can "remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church" (1 Cor. 4:17). Timothy, however, seems not to have been up to the challenge posed by the Corinthian church, and after this trip, which was not successful, he returned to Paul, being associated in the greeting of 2 Cor. 1:1.

It seems to have been the combination of a harsh letter (2 Corinthians 10–13) and the visit of another assistant, Titus, that swung the Corinthians back into line (as Paul saw it). Titus had

earlier traveled with Paul to Jerusalem and been involved there in a major crisis, which we shall describe when we discuss Galatians.

Both these men were gentiles although, according to Acts 16:1, Timothy had a Jewish mother and a Greek father. In some versions of the Jewish law, descent was purely matrilineal, which would have made Timothy Jewish. Not everyone agreed entirely with this view (see Philo, *On the Life of Moses*, 2.193), and in any case Timothy had not been circumcised, which called his Jewishness into question. According to Acts 16:3, Paul had Timothy circumcised, which would have ended any controversy.

Silvanus (called Silas in Acts), the third major person who may be justly called an assistant, was apparently Jewish (see Acts 15:22). Paul names him in his greeting to the Thessalonians, putting his name ahead of Timothy (1 Thess. 1:1). He also states that Silvanus preached to the Corinthians along with Timothy and himself (2 Cor. 1:19). Silvanus plays a major role in Acts, while Titus is not mentioned. Paul's two references to Silvanus show that he was active with him fairly early. He was with Paul when he wrote 1 Thessalonians, and he had preached in Corinth on Paul's first trip there (2 Cor. 1:19); but he seems not to have had the close relationship with Paul that Timothy and Titus had, and he may have gone his own way.

There were lots of other missionaries, some completely independent of Paul, some in opposition to him, some independent but collaborating. One of the complicating factors in Galatia and Corinth—in fact, the major complicating factor—was that there were competing missionaries, who preached “another gospel” or “another Jesus” (Gal. 1:6; 2 Cor. 11:4). Competing versions of the gospel will be one of our major concerns in discussing the theological issues of Paul's career, and here we shall not consider Paul's opponents, but rather note allies.

Barnabas and Apollos merit special treatment and more space than

we shall here give them. Barnabas is a major figure in Acts, a Jewish convert of some means who was instrumental in Paul's own career, who was one of the leaders of the church in Antioch, and who traveled both with Paul and independently (Acts 4:36; 9:27; 11:22, 30; chaps. 13, 14, and 15). In the extant letters, Paul refers to him in only two places: Galatians 2 and 1 Cor. 9:6. According to Galatians 2, Barnabas went with Paul to Jerusalem, taking Titus, to sort out the issue of the relationship between the gentile converts and the Jewish law (vv. 1, 9). In Antioch, when Peter separated himself from the gentile Christians, "even Barnabas" was led astray (Gal. 2:13), and this seems to have led to a rupture.

In the Corinthian passage, Paul asks if it is only he and Barnabas "who have no right to refrain from working for a living." This seems to indicate that, after the break in Antioch (Gal. 2:11-13), he still considered Barnabas to be an apostle on the right side—his. We see, however, that Barnabas was essentially independent of Paul.

This is also true of Apollos. According to Acts, he was an Alexandrian Jew who had been baptized with John's baptism and who preached Jesus, but who was still somewhat deficient. He worked both in Ephesus and Corinth, and Paul had to correct his converts (Acts 18:24-19:7). We learn from 1 Corinthians that the problem was not that Apollos knew only John's baptism, but that some believers said "I belong to Apollos" and boasted in Apollos's superior wisdom and preaching (1 Cor. 1:12). Paul defended his own lack of eloquence and warned that Apollos should be careful how he built on Paul's foundation (1 Cor. 1:12, 17; 2:1; 3:10-15; 4:6). Yet Paul wished to remain on good terms with Apollos and even tried to subordinate him to his own plans, attempting to get him to make a trip to Corinth. Apollos did not go, and he retained independence (1 Cor. 16:12).

These two men give some idea of the variety of Christian

missionaries and thus of the nature of the movement. The message that Jesus had been raised and had appeared to his followers resulted in a great burst of evangelistic endeavor.

Romans 16 is an invaluable source of information about the Pauline mission and some other workers whom Paul claimed as his allies. As we noted above, some scholars think that this chapter was sent not to Rome but to another church, possibly Ephesus. There are two important points: a very early manuscript, Papyrus 46, puts the benediction now found in Rom. 16:25–27 after the present 15:33, making chapter 16 look like a separate piece. Further, in Romans 16, Paul greets twenty-six people by name, which would mean that an amazing number of people who were known to Paul farther east, especially in Asia (western Asia Minor), must have moved to the capital.¹⁵ Our use of the chapter, however, does not depend on identifying the place to which the letter was sent.

The chapter introduces a traveling minister, Phoebe (16:1). The term *diakonos*, “minister,” is often translated “deaconess”; but it is a term that Paul uses of himself (2 Cor. 3:6; 6:4), himself and Apollos (1 Cor. 3:5), and Timothy (1 Thess. 3:2), and there is no reason to give it a special translation when it is used of a woman. Phoebe probably was a preacher (cf. women as prophets, 1 Cor. 11:5).

Romans 16 mentions many other Christian workers. Paul names as those with him, who send greetings, Timothy and six others: three Jews, Gaius his host, Erastus the city treasurer (we do not know of what city), and Quartus. The scribe, Tertius, adds his own greeting (16:21–23). We do not know anything more about the three Jewish men (Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, Rom. 16:21). Conceivably they were Paul’s converts, but they seem to be leaders of the church from which Paul wrote, and they may have been independent missionaries,

15. For a brief account of the problem, see Charles D. Myers Jr., “Romans,” *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:818–19.

as were Aquila and Andronicus (see below). Thus Paul wrote from a city that had a mixed congregation, partly gentile and partly Jewish, and which included some people of prominence. One, Gaius, was prosperous enough to provide a room for Paul, as well as a meeting room for the church, and one was a city official. Many city officials were men of means, since their duties required expenditures and were not subsidized.

The list of those greeted is even more interesting. The letter singles out twenty-seven people, plus two families, for greetings. Two couples stand out: Prisca and Aquila, Andronicus and Junia or Julia. (See p. 108.)

These were missionary couples; the first is known also from Acts (18:2, 26). Andronicus and Junia, Paul writes, were Jews and were “in Christ” before him. Both couples were independent of him, but counted as allies or perhaps friendly competitors. Junia is frequently called Junias in modern translations, and she and Andronicus are often called “men,” as by the RSV (16:7; corrected in the NRSV). Paul says that they were “of note among the apostles,” which may mean either “of whom they are two” or “of note *to* the apostles.” The tradition of masculinizing Junia’s name has had the purpose of eliminating the possibility that Paul called a woman, Junia (or Julia), an apostle. But the name is well attested as feminine and never as masculine.¹⁶

Besides Prisca, Junia and Phoebe, there are six more women:

Mary	“who has worked hard among you”
Tryphaena and Tryphosa	“workers in the Lord”
The mother of Rufus	“his mother and mine”
Julia and the sister of Nereus	“greetings”

16. The NRSV has the feminine name “Junia,” but the NIV clings to the masculine “Junias,” with no footnote.

Thus we meet here three women who are leaders in the movement (Prisca, Junia, and Phoebe) and three more who are called “workers.” Women were active in Christian missionary work, and Paul’s mission was no exception. We must mention also Chloe, who has a major role in the Corinthian correspondence (see 1 Cor. 1:11).

The list of men is also interesting. Aquila and Andronicus are members of important husband-and-wife missionary teams. Urbanus is “a fellow worker,” and Persis has “worked hard in the Lord.” Epaenetus is distinguished as the first convert in Asia (that is, in the Roman province of Asia, in western Asia Minor). Rufus is “eminent in the Lord”; Apelles is “approved”; Ampliatus and Stachys are “beloved.” Only one, Herodion, is Jewish. The rest receive just “greetings,” as do nameless others who are “with” some of those named, probably as members of house churches. The lack of public buildings for meetings of Christians made large congregations impossible, and we see here how they were divided into small groups.

Paul’s mission field, then, was full of activity. There were missionaries (apparently mostly Jewish), local workers, assistants, prosperous people who made their houses available, concerned converts who traveled or sent their servants to keep Paul informed, and Paul with his small band of assistants and co-preachers. Paul was part of a small explosion of energetic people who had been galvanized into activity by the death and resurrection of Jesus and the preaching of the first apostles.

Money

In the Corinthian correspondence Paul frequently stresses his poverty.

- To the present hour we are hungry and thirsty, we are poorly clothed and beaten and homeless, and we grow weary with the

work of our own hands. . . . We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things, to this very day. (1 Cor. 4:11-13)

- . . . beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger . . . (2 Cor 6:5)
- . . . as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything. (2 Cor. 6:10)
- . . . in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked. (2 Cor. 11:27)

“Apostles, money, and the Corinthian church” is an interesting issue, which we shall explore in the chapters on the Corinthian letters. Here, however, I wish merely to record Paul’s claim of poverty, as we have just done, and note that there were exceptions to it. Sometimes he had plenty:

I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. (Phil. 4:11-12)

But on the whole money must have been in short supply. His mission, with aides and travel, must have cost more money than he could earn as a tentmaker during the periods when he stayed for several months in one city. Much of the time he was on the road; food costs money, while travel takes time away from the work that earns it. Even if we suppose that Paul, Timothy, Titus, and Silvanus all supported themselves as long as they were settled in one location, and further that his secretary (scribe) was lent him by a convert, or was a convert who worked nights for free in order to handle Paul’s correspondence, we shall still have to find more money to explain their freedom of travel and communication. Being chief

operating officer of a going concern required cash, even though it was a charitable concern and many people donated their time.

If Paul had inherited wealth, presumably he would not have fluctuated between plenty and poverty. The only possible source of the money required for his trips and associated expenses was his converts:

You Philippians indeed know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you alone. For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs more than once. (Phil. 4:15f.)

That is, the Philippians (in Macedonia) helped Paul both while he was at his other Macedonian church (Thessalonica) and also after he left, probably for Achaia, in Greece, the province that included Athens and Corinth. Paul continues by thanking the Philippians for a gift that they have just sent him in prison (possibly in Ephesus), and he presents it as a religious merit and as a sacrifice: “Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the profit that accumulates to your account. . . . [It is] a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God” (Phil. 4:17–18).

Indeed, in the midst of reminding the Corinthians of his deprivations, and of the fact that he did not take money from them (2 Cor. 11:7), he admits that he “robbed other churches by accepting support from them,” and that his “needs were supplied by the friends who came from Macedonia”—probably, again, the Philippians (2 Cor. 11:8f.).

We have already noted that some of Paul’s converts were prosperous. Such people as Gaius (Rom. 16:23) and Philemon (Philem. 1, 22) may have assisted him with money as well as food and housing. He calls Phoebe, the minister whom Romans 16 introduces, the “benefactor” or “patron” (*prostatis*)¹⁷ “of many and of myself as

well.” This is the clearest indication of financial support from an individual. Although Paul does not say that Chloe helped him financially, she is another example of a fairly prosperous convert. She could afford to send “her people” from Corinth to Paul in Ephesus, where they reported on the disputes among the Corinthian Christians (1 Cor. 1:11). I suspect that Paul owed his travel money to people such as Phoebe, and from them he sometimes had enough money that he knew “what it is to have plenty” (Phil. 4:12). It is also worth noting that he expected the church in Rome, which he had not founded, and on which therefore he had little claim, to pay his way to Spain (Rom. 15:24, “be sent on by you”).

I emphasize the presence of prosperous people in Paul’s congregations because so many people in the ancient world earned little more than enough to provide themselves with food, clothing, and housing. Such people, to be sure, can always cut back a little on their expenditures and give some money on a weekly basis to a charitable institution. It seems to me unlikely, however, that these tiny individual sums were collected and conveyed to Paul regularly enough to allow him and his companions to spend several months on the road (as when he traveled from Syrian Antioch to Ephesus). Of course he stopped wherever he had a church, and the church would have helped pay the expenses for the next leg of his trip, but the churches were not thick enough on the ground to allow him to stop at one very often. Thus I suspect the presence of “benefactors,” probably others in addition to Phoebe, the one person to whom he gives that title in the surviving correspondence.

17. Instead of “benefactor” (so the NRSV) or “patron” (the most literal translation), the RSV has “helper,” the NIV has “she has been a great help,” and the JB offers “she has looked after” (Paul and others). “Help,” “helper,” and “looking after” in English are more general, and more “feminine,” than *prostatís*, which implies financial help. Some women had independent means, and we should not suppose that all financial aid must have come from males.

Nevertheless, Paul and his companions sometimes ran out of money and were ill-clad, hungry, and cold.

We noted above that the way in which Paul referred to using his own hands to work is revealing: the poor do not find working with their hands to be worthy of special remark. We suggested that, though he had learned a craft, he had probably been trained for ownership or management. He knew how to use a secretary, and he dictated his letters, as we see in Gal. 6:11, where he notes when he writes in his own hand, and Rom. 16:22, where his scribe sends his own greetings.

I should also repeat here that Paul knew how to organize and plan. Most of the time he had more than one assistant; he could send one here, another there, while himself going elsewhere, and rejoin them to assess the situation and make further plans.

This evidence of a relatively prosperous upbringing (what we may think of as good middle-class conditions) helps explain the degree to which he felt his poverty, and his previous prosperity is probably part of the explanation of his laments in the Corinthian letters. This poverty, however, was voluntary, and in Paul's letters we do not hear the voice of the lowest level of Greco-Roman society, though sometimes he lived in abject conditions.

This concludes the introductory chapters. We turn now to the heart of the matter, the letters themselves.

PART II

The Letters

The Collection, Publication, and Dates of the Letters

Collection and Publication

Paul wrote his letters to individual people and churches. The “churches,” however, did not have their own buildings and professional staffs. As we noted above, the word translated “church”—*ekklēsia*—would better be translated “congregation” since it referred to a group of people, not to a building or an organization. This makes it likely that each letter, after being read aloud to the congregation, was kept by an individual, probably the one who was able to provide a gathering place. We may assume that some people kept the letters more carefully than did others. Loss and wastage, damage by insects and rodents, destruction by fire, and other calamities are likely. We have no idea how many letters Paul wrote; to our knowledge only seven still survive—thanks to having been copied numerous times, as pointed out above.

The first surviving reference to the existence of a collection of Christian letters appears in the book of Revelation (the Apocalypse) in the New Testament. The author had a vision of “one like the Son of Man,” who dictated to him seven letters to seven churches (Rev. 1:13). Apocalypses do not ordinarily contain letters, and it is overwhelmingly probable that the seven letters to seven churches reveal the influence of the publication of Paul’s letters.

Revelation was written in the 90s. In this same period other “letters”—that is, homilies cast into letter form—immediately appear. Hebrews, a homily or theological essay, has aspects of the letter form and refers to one of Paul’s colleagues: “I appeal to you, brothers and sisters . . . our brother Timothy has been set free . . .” (Heb. 13:22–25). Another essay, the book of James, is written in the form of a letter (“James, a servant of God . . . to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion,” James 1:1).

Moreover, James explicitly takes issue with an aspect of Paul’s teaching: “a person is justified by works and not by faith alone” (James 2:14). In this section the author cites the case of Abraham, apparently alluding to chapter 4 in Paul’s letter to the Romans. (James, I hasten to add, misconstrued Paul’s emphasis on faith as excluding works. Paul steadfastly believed in good works, as we shall frequently see.) Both Hebrews and James were written about the same time as Revelation.

In this partial list of early documents that reveal the existence of a corpus of Paul’s letters, we should especially mention *1 Clement*, written by Clement of Rome to Corinth in about the year 96, which refers to Paul’s first letter to Corinth several times. Thus *1 Clem.* 47:1–3: “Take up the letter of blessed Paul the apostle. What did he first write to you ‘in the beginning of the gospel?’” The quotation is from Phil. 4:15, thus displaying knowledge of Philippians as well as of 1 Corinthians.

I skip over a few other references to Paul and his letters in early Christian literature. Early in the second century, Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch in Syria, while on his way to martyrdom in Rome, wrote seven letters to seven churches, quoting heavily from Paul.

Thus sometime in the 90s Paul's seven letters became widely known in Christian circles, which means that they had been collected and published. Their impact was enormous, and Paul's letters were never again out of the limelight. (On how letters were published, see above, pp. 134–35.)

The tendency to use quotations from Paul, once his writings became available, was so strong that we may confidently think that Christian literature that does not contain quotations or allusions to his letters was written prior to the publication of the Pauline letter corpus. This literature includes all four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles.

We noted above that it is possible that the motivation for the collection of Paul's letters in fact came in part from the publication of Acts, which in the mid- to late 80s may have inspired someone to travel around Asia Minor and Greece to see what further information could be found. The collector or collectors came home with a fantastic treasure.

If Paul was known to have written seven letters to seven churches, what were they? On the evidence provided by early quotations (such as those in *1 Clement*), the collection seems to have included letters to seven churches and one individual. I give them in order of length, which was significant in the history of arrangement of the Pauline corpus:¹

1. After the division of Corinthians into 1 and 2 Corinthians, and the similar division of Thessalonians, the sequence in length was Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, and so on, as in modern translations, except that now Galatians is one step higher than its length would indicate and Ephesians one step lower. For more detail on the sequence of letters in the corpus, see John Knox, *Philemon Among the Letters of Paul*, rev. ed. (London: Collins, 1959), 76–90.

Corinthians (the entire correspondence)

Romans

Ephesians

Thessalonians (both 1 Thess. and 2 Thess.)

Galatians

Colossians

Philippians

Philemon

It will be noted that this list contains three letters that are not on the list of “undisputed” letters by Paul, and which I do not attribute to him: Ephesians, Colossians, and 2 Thessalonians.

If those who doubt that Paul himself dictated these letters are correct, the conclusion must be that people wrote in his name either before or at the time of the publication of the letters. I think that that is precisely what happened. A later crisis, or at least some later issues, arose when Paul was no longer available—probably because he had died, but possibly just because he had moved too far west. In response to the new situation, someone, presumably a disciple or close follower, wrote in Paul’s name what he thought Paul would have written.

Letters Whose Authenticity Is Not
Questioned

<i>Sequence in Modern Bibles</i>	<i>Chronological Sequence</i>
Romans	1 Thessalonians
1 Corinthians	1 Corinthians
2 Corinthians	2 Corinthians 10–13
Galatians	2 Corinthians 1–9
Philippians	Galatians
1 Thessalonians	Philippians
Philemon	Romans; Philemon (sequence unknown)

Disputed Letters (Letters written in Paul's
name by his followers; called
"deuteropauline letters")

Ephesians
Colossians
2 Thessalonians
1 Timothy
2 Timothy
Titus

These lists are not eccentric. Some New Testament scholars might construct them a little differently, but the view that Paul himself did not write or dictate every letter that is attributed to him in the New Testament has been accepted for decades. One might wish to compare the above lists with a categorization in the work of a leading conservative scholar, J. D. G. Dunn.²

One of the reasons for thinking that Paul himself did not write Ephesians and Colossians is that they rely very heavily on the undisputed letters. Many sentences in Colossians are made up of

2. J. D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 13 n. 39.

three- or four-word phrases taken word-for-word from one of the authentic letters. Ephesians also quotes heavily from the undisputed letters. Paul himself doubtless repeated favorite words and phrases, but we do not find the sort of verbatim agreement in the undisputed letters that we find in Colossians and Ephesians. As G. W. MacRae once said, Colossians is too Pauline to be Pauline.³

People who know Greek can study this very easily because Pauline parallels, with underlining to show verbatim agreement, have been published, and the verdict of “too Pauline to be by Paul himself” has been confirmed in independent studies.⁴

There are other arguments against the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians, Colossians, and Ephesians. They reflect circumstances near to the end of the first century (decades after Paul’s death), the theology differs from Paul in striking ways,⁵ the vocabulary and style are sufficiently different from the undoubted letters to raise objections, and so on.

Before beginning this book, however, I resolutely resolved not to discuss authenticity in detail. The topic requires knowledge of Greek, and issues of grammar, syntax, and vocabulary are very tedious to explain in a book written for English readers. Moreover, all too often the outcome is dictated by dogma rather than by evidence.

3. G. W. MacRae, “The Colossian Heresy and Modern Gnostic Scholarship.” This was a paper read at the 1972 Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas meeting. I have been unable to find a published form of this lecture.

4. For Ephesians, see Edgar J. Goodspeed, *The Meaning of Ephesians* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1933); confirmed by, among others, C. L. Mitton, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1951). For Colossians, see E. P. Sanders, “Literary Dependence in Colossians,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 85 (1966): 28–45; confirmed by Outi Leppä, *The Making of Colossians: A Study of the Formation and Purpose of a Deutero-Pauline Letter*, Publications of the Finnish Exegetical Society 86 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003). See also Fred O. Francis and J. Paul Sampley, eds., *Pauline Parallels*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

5. The most striking point is the “realized eschatology” of Eph. 2:4–6: Christians have already been “saved,” and they have already been raised up to dwell in the heavenly places. Paul reserved resurrection for the future.

For most right-wing Christians, if the letter says “Paul,” Paul wrote it, and there is no debate, no body of evidence that can change a predetermined “fact.” With the exception of the brief comments above and a few more on Ephesians, immediately below, I shall not, therefore, explain in any detail why some letters are considered “authentic” (written or dictated by Paul himself) and others are believed to have been written pseudonymously by one or more of his followers or disciples.

I do, however, wish to present a few points about the authorship of Ephesians. The Goodspeed-Knox-Mitton hypothesis (see notes 1 and 4), to simplify and generalize slightly different positions, is that Ephesians was probably written at Ephesus, and also probably by the collector and editor of the letters. It reveals precise knowledge of *all* of the undoubted letters in the corpus (except Philemon), and must therefore have originated after they had been collected. It was probably intended to be a “cover letter,” conscientiously emphasizing some of Paul’s main themes. It is, therefore, highly “Pauline” in its own way, showing interesting developments within what must have been a Pauline “school.” It depends more heavily on Colossians than on any of the other letters, and so it may have come from about the same time and place as did Colossians.

Colossians, in turn, seems to have been written by someone who had studied Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians: what Germans call the *Hauptbriefe*, the “main letters.” Thus when it was written at least part of the collection must have been assembled.

Colossae was a fairly small place near Ephesus, a great city. The very close literary relationship between Ephesians and Colossians leads many scholars to think that the collection itself was put together in this region, probably in Ephesus.⁶

6. On all of this, see the books by Goodspeed, Knox, and Mitton in notes 1 and 4.

Although I do not treat Colossians and Ephesians as Pauline in the strict sense—dictated by him—I do not intend thereby to belittle them. They are important in their own right and important in the development of Christianity in general and of Paulinism in particular. I have two notes to add to this discussion of the collection:

If Paul kept copies of his own letters, it would have been mechanically possible for him to compose a letter (say, Ephesians) that consisted of phrases and lines from his earlier letters. But there is no reason to think that he made copies of his letters and saved them. This would have taken a lot of scribal time and effort, and Paul can hardly have had a full-time secretary. Nor would he have any reason to think of saving his letters for posterity, since he thought that the Lord would return within a short period of time (see 1 Thessalonians and chap. 9 below). Nor was he so infertile of thought that he needed to replay substantial pieces of earlier writings. Letters like Galatians and the Corinthian correspondence clearly show that *his brain was working as he dictated*. To envisage him as pawing back through previous work and lifting phrases from here and there is to change his character considerably.

Some of the same objections may be put to the proposal that the presence of a secretary and the naming of co-senders means that the letters were “corporate enterprises” “in which the author employed co-worker secretaries and pieces composed by others in the letter[s] that went out over his name.”⁷

The principal “benefit” of this view is that it allows Colossians, Ephesians, and the “Pastoral Epistles” (1 and 2 Timothy; Titus) to be regarded as “written by Paul.” The great disadvantage is that it obscures the vigor and insightfulness of the Paul of the genuine letters

7. E. Earle Ellis, “Preformed Traditions and Their Implications for Pauline Christology,” *Christology, Controversy, and Community: New Testament Essays in Honour of David R. Catchpole*, ed. David G. Horrell and Christopher M. Tuckett (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 303–20; Ellis, *The Making of the New Testament Documents* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 39–42.

and tends to reduce them all to the level of the Pastorals, which are pleasant and beneficial to read, but which do not have the fire, drive, and religious insight of the authentic letters.

Paul was personally highly involved in his disputes, and tossing a contentious problem in one of his congregations to an assistant and saying, “Here, take care of this,” would be distancing himself from what he really cared about. Further, the functioning of the brain in the undisputed letters reveals a religious genius at work. Titus and Timothy—his closest assistants—were doubtless great men, and Paul may from time to time have had a good scribe, but we should attribute the letters to Paul himself—except for the ones that he did not write, which are called not Pauline but *deuteropauline*, referring to the “school” of his followers, who wrote letters in his name after his death.

I shall restate my view of Paul’s letters: he dictated them himself (rather than giving some ideas or themes to a secretary or assistant); he did not substantially revise them; and they reveal his mind at work.⁸

I wish to give a few lines to a rather romantic suggestion of one of my teachers, John Knox. In *Philemon Among the Letters of Paul*, he asked why we have one personal letter in a collection of letters to congregations. The letter to Philemon was written on behalf of a runaway slave, Onesimus, who came to Paul seeking refuge. Paul liked Onesimus, who was presumably a young man (see below), and thought highly of him: “I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you. I wanted to keep him with me, so that he might be of service to me . . .” (Philem. 12-13).

Then the student notes, Professor Knox observed, that in Ignatius’s

8. Some scholars believe that Paul first wrote a draft and then revised each letter again and again. Others believe that he wrote his letters with several scrolls of the LXX before him. On both these points see pp. 170-71.

letter to the Ephesians he refers to a group of men from Ephesus who visited him while he was in Smyrna, in chains, on his way to Rome around 110 CE. Ignatius wrote, “I received in the name of God your whole congregation in the person of Onesimus, a man of inexpressible love and your bishop” (Ign. *Eph.* 1.3; cf. 2.1; 6.2 for further references to Onesimus).

Next, one notes that Onesimus was probably from Colossae, since the author of Colossians refers to “Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother,” in Col. 4:9.

Finally, in his letter to Ephesus, Ignatius states that he would like to keep two of the Ephesians, Burrhus and Crocus, with him for a little longer (Ign. *Eph.* 2.1). In making this request, and elsewhere in this letter, Ignatius’s wording seems to indicate that he had recently been reading Paul’s letter to Philemon concerning the slave Onesimus.

Putting these clues together, Knox proposed that Onesimus the slave who fled to Paul and Onesimus the bishop of Ephesus a few decades later were one and the same person. In this case, he was probably a leading and active member of the Ephesian church twenty years or so earlier than Ignatius’s letter (as people do not start out as bishops). And, if so, he probably had a hand in the collection of Paul’s letters. Knox suggests that the collection was made under his oversight.⁹

If we accept Knox’s view, Onesimus the runaway slave did manage to serve Paul, though not in the same way as Paul had in mind when he said that he would like to keep him.

Chronologically, this will work. I do not wish to pretend that I know the precise date for each of Paul’s letters. Besides, Paul was in prison when he wrote Philippians, and we do not know what prison or what year. But let us take a not unreasonable date for the

9. Knox, *Philemon*, 107.

composition of Philemon: 55. Let us similarly take a round number for the date of Ignatius's letter to the Ephesians: 106, fifty-one years later. If Onesimus was young when he ran away, he could easily have lived for another fifty-one years. And it is probable that Onesimus *was* young when he ran away, simply because that is when slaves ran away. Fifty-year old men, after a lifetime of slavery, had had youthful dreams beaten out of them—if not by rods, then by circumstances. To run away, one needed to be young, full of hope, strong, vigorous, able to walk for miles up and down mountains day after day, and so on.

I like Professor Knox's suggestion. There is no proof, but it ties a lot of things together: the close relationship of Colossae and Ephesus and the closer relationship of Colossians and Ephesians; the probability that Paul's letters were assembled in Ephesus; Ignatius's references to Onesimus and the hints in his letter that he had Paul's letter about Onesimus in mind.

Dates

As indicated above, I do not wish to give firm dates of the events of Paul's life or the composition of his letters. There are too many uncertainties, and one has to make too many suppositions in order to offer a more or less workable chronology. I am, in general, satisfied to say that Paul was converted in the early 30s, that he wrote the first surviving letter (1 Thessalonians) in the early 40s, and that he wrote the rest of the extant letters a few years later and in a fairly short period of time (the late 40s or early 50s to the mid or late 50s).

I shall mention just two of the things that we do not know in order to exemplify the difficulties of creating a firm chronology.

1. We do not know when he founded the congregation or congregations in Galatia (the middle of Asia Minor, in the

general region of modern Ankara).¹⁰ He says nothing at all about it, except that at the time he was ill (Gal. 4:13–14). Nothing in the narrative of Acts allows for this founding visit, and it is not at all clear where we should make room for it.

2. We cannot be sure where or when Paul was in prison when he wrote Philemon and Philippians. Acts has two imprisonments, in Palestine and Rome, but it is not reasonable to think that Onesimus fled from Colossae and reached either place, nor that Paul could send him back from either place. Everyone, more or less, thinks that there must have been an imprisonment in Asia, probably in Ephesus, in the middle of Paul's career, but we do not know for sure when or where to place it.¹¹

When I do wish to give an approximate date, I put it within the range of possibilities provided by the chronological table at the end of an insightful study of the chronology of Paul written by Gerd Lüdemann.¹² The following chronological table represents Lüdemann's conclusions, based on two possible dates for the death of Jesus (all dates are CE).

- | | |
|------------|--|
| 27 (or 30) | Crucifixion of Jesus |
| 30 (or 33) | Paul's conversion in or near Damascus; stay in Arabia; return to Damascus |
| 33 (or 36) | Paul's first visit to Jerusalem |
| 34 (or 37) | Journey to Syria and Cilicia; mission there and in south Galatia, together with Barnabas and under the auspices of the Antioch mission |

10. The location of Galatia is disputed. See chap. 16 for a brief discussion and appendix II for full detail.

11. On the probability of an imprisonment and a description of the role of prisons in the ancient world, see chap. 20 on Philippians.

12. Gerd Lüdemann, *Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles: Studies in Chronology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 262f.

COLLECTION, PUBLICATION, AND DATES OF THE LETTERS

From ca. 36 (39)	Paul's independent mission in Europe: Philippi, Thessalonica
41	Edict of Claudius concerning the Jews in Rome
Ca. 41	Paul in Corinth: 1 Thessalonians
Before or after the mission in Greece	Founding of the Galatian congregations owing to sickness; incident in Antioch, which was perhaps the direct occasion for—
47 (50)	The second visit to Jerusalem and Jerusalem conference; following this, the journey to the Pauline congregations to organize the collection
Summer 48 (51)	Paul in Galatia
Fall 48 (51)–Spring 50 (53)	Paul in Ephesus
Fall 48 (51)	Sending of Timothy to Macedonia and Corinth; the previous letter to Corinth with instruction for the collection (or this latter through a messenger)
Winter 48/ 49 (51/52)	Timothy in Macedonia
Spring 49 (52)	Letter of the Corinthians with question about the collection (or this by oral inquiry)
Ca. Easter 49 (52)	1 Corinthians
Summer 49 (52)	After bad news from Corinth by Timothy, Paul's intervening visit to Corinth and precipitate return to Ephesus; letter of tears and the sending of Titus to Corinth
Winter 49/ 50 (52/53)	Deadly danger for Paul (imprisonment in Ephesus?)
Spring 50 (53)	Journey of Paul with Timothy from Ephesus to Troas; further journey to Macedonia
Summer 50 (53)	Arrival of Titus in Macedonia from Corinth; bad news from Galatia; composition of 2 Corinthians 1–9, 2 Corinthians 10–13, and Galatians; sending of Titus with 2 Corinthians to Corinth in order to organize the completion of the collection

PAUL

Winter 50/ 51 (53/54)	Paul in Macedonia; completion of the collection there
51/52	Gallio as proconsul of Achaia
Spring/ summer 51 (54)	Journey of Paul with Macedonian attendants to Corinth; completion of the collection there
Winter 51/ 52 (54/55)	Paul in Corinth; Romans
Spring 52 (55)	Journey to Jerusalem in order to deliver the collection

Quite frequently ancient authors did not put dates on their letters.¹³ Most personal letters were for immediate consumption, not posterity. Even when letters were published, the author did not go back through them and attach dates. The ancient world simply did not have the obsession with dates that we have. Moreover, there was no uniform system of dates. Things might be dated by a regnal year (the third year of Domitian, for example), or from the (supposed) date of the founding of Rome, but the individual regions of the Roman Empire probably each had its own system of dates. There was no reason for the Galatians, for example, to use Roman dates rather than Phrygian dates—even if they knew them.

Thus we can date ancient letters only by noting the events to which reference is made—some of which may have known dates (such as the eruption of Vesuvius). Unfortunately, Paul did not refer to current events in his letters. It is easier to establish the sequence of the letters than their calendar dates, and for our purposes the sequence is what is important.

We shall now study the letters one by one, in chronological order, which I repeat for the sake of convenience: 1 Thessalonians, 1

13. See Hans-Josef Klauck, *Ancient Letters and the New Testament: A Guide to Context and Exegesis* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006), 25.

Corinthians, 2 Corinthians 10–13, 2 Corinthians 1–9, Galatians, Philippians, and Romans. This leaves out Philemon, aspects of which we considered in this chapter; we shall return to it in chapter 20 on Philippians.

On Reading Paul's Letters: Introductory Remarks

Reading for Historical Information

The most common way of reading the Bible is to search for the “moral” of the story, that is, to seek lessons that can be applied in the present, either to the reader’s or hearer’s own life or to a public issue. This works well for a preacher who is preparing a sermon and for any individual who carries out private devotions or who seeks help in time of need. There is nothing at all wrong with these devout and edifying practices. The present task, however, is to explain Paul *historically*, which requires analyzing the circumstances of the time and studying what he wrote regarding specific issues that arose in the lives of his converts or in his dealings with other leaders of the Christian movement. These ancient issues may or may not be immediately relevant to the concerns of the present.

To illustrate the situation I shall take as a concrete example a non-Pauline passage, Mal. 4:10: “Bring the full tithe into the storehouse.”

Many churches use biblical passages on the tithe (a now-antiquated word meaning “tenth”) to urge parishioners to give ten percent of their income to the church.

I am entirely in favor of charitable gifts, but the historian’s interest lies elsewhere. The historian would explain some basic facts about the biblical tithe, a few of which we went through in an earlier chapter (pp. 35–38): it was a tenth of a farmer’s agricultural produce, and it helped support the Levites and the priests—especially the Levites. There was a second tithe, part of which should be taken to Jerusalem at festival time, to support the farmer and his family during their stay (a statute for the economic welfare of Jerusalem). Finally, a part of the second tithe should be given to the poor and helpless—traditionally widows and orphans. In the ancient world, these various purposes of the tithes led to various problems of interpretation. Should there actually be three tithes a year? Or two, with one of them divided into two parts—and so on.

Historians study the passages and the ancient debates in order to see what was going on in the past. The moral significance of tithing is a question for homiletics; the historical practices are the meat of historians. Historical analysis does not destroy the moral points. It does not prevent the reader from seeing that organized religion usually includes a professional clergy that requires support and that it is good to be charitable to the poor. These morals, however, are not the point of historical work.

To return to Malachi: Besides explaining what tithes were, the historian will explain that there was a socioeconomic issue: if farmers did not pay their tithes, the Levites and possibly even the priests would be forced to desert their posts in order to farm their own land or engage in other employment, and the sacrificial services would cease. Keeping the Levites fed so that they would continue to help

with the sacrifices was an actual problem at the time of Malachi (see Neh. 13:10).

The interest of the present book is a historical analysis of the letters of Paul. The reader will run into lots of discussion of both theology and ethics, but he or she will be constantly pressed to see the issues as they appeared to Paul in the first century, and there will be very little application to the present.

Identifying Presuppositions and Topics

We shall be concerned to get *behind* the text, to see what led Paul to write what he wrote. To do this, we shall use clues in the text to reconstruct the specific circumstances that prompted the letter. Words always have meaning in some context or other, and we shall try to determine the meaning of Paul's words in their specific ancient situations, which means reconstructing the context.

Illustrating how one gets behind the letters will be done a little more leisurely in chapter eight, a "tutorial" on 1 Thessalonians, than in subsequent chapters. We shall somewhat painstakingly go through the process that is sometimes called "mirror reading"—asking what circumstances the text "reflects." This is a delicate enterprise, since it can be both underdone and overdone. We shall begin with the simple search for presuppositions in the text and the sequence of events.

To take a modern example of a text's **presuppositions**: a newspaper reports that, according to the Pentagon, more American soldiers will be needed in Afghanistan.

This statement *presupposes* knowledge that American military forces are currently engaged in Afghanistan (or were so engaged at the time the story was printed). This discovery of a presupposition is so obvious today that it may appear to be simpleminded rather than merely simple. Everyone who reads a newspaper reads dozens,

perhaps even hundreds of statements that require prior knowledge. The vast majority of newspaper readers have the required prior knowledge, and so they do not even notice the fact that they have to have it in order to understand what they read. But if a reader were to live in a biosphere for a year and be totally without news, the first newspaper he or she read would be puzzling. Newspaper stories seldom begin by giving the background of current events, and it might take a few days for the reader to find out what the stories signify.

When it comes to Paul's letters, we all begin in a pristine, unspoiled state of ignorance about the events that led up to the letter. We need to figure out why Paul wrote what he wrote, and we do that by asking in a systematic way what lies behind his statements. The statements often reflect a prior situation, and the inferences that lead us to understand the subject are based on "mirror reading": asking what each statement presupposes or reflects.

One of the main concerns of the chapters that follow will be the investigation of the various topics that are discussed in Paul's letters.

I explained above that the mere discovery of the topics of Paul's letters is more challenging than one might expect (introduction, pp. xxxi-xxxii). The simple listing of topics avoids one of the pitfalls of reading Paul's letters: regarding him as a theological "Johnny-one-note," a man with only one thing to say. His one note is usually taken to be the requirement of "justification by faith," which is not even a topic in most of the letters. Listing topics is the beginning of wisdom—only the beginning, to be sure, but one must start somewhere. We shall see that Paul was a man of infinite variety who dealt with a large range of topics. All readers who wish to understand Paul will find it very helpful to *memorize the topics* of each letter. If they can remember the topics, they have a good chance of remembering what he said about them.

Reading the Letters in Translation

For the most part, these aims can be fulfilled on the basis of the English translation of the Bible, though for detailed study of Pauline themes it will be necessary to refer to the Greek text, which I shall sometimes have to translate and explain.

Total reliance on translation is problematic, but it has a long history. The first Bible of the early church was the Septuagint—the Greek translation of Hebrew Scripture. Adding new material in Greek to make up a “New Testament” was, from the point of view of language, quite simple for most people in the Roman Empire. The Christians had a Greek “Old Testament” and soon they had a Greek New Testament. The two together made up the Greek Bible.

Some of the Western churches, however, especially those in southern Gaul and North Africa, began to need Latin translations. (Greek continued to be used in the Roman church well into the third century.) There were various Latin versions. In order to end the differences between competing Latin texts, a great and learned man, Jerome, beginning in 382 CE, made a new translation from Hebrew and Greek into Latin. At first, of course, there was resistance to accepting Jerome’s translation, since people clung to the versions that they knew and loved. But eventually Jerome’s Latin translation, called the “Vulgate” (*editio vulgata*, “common version”) became the accepted text of the Bible.

Thus from its very beginnings, when the Bible was the Septuagint (not the original Hebrew), and did not yet include the New Testament, Christianity has considered some translation or other to be “the Bible” or “Sacred Scripture” and has held that a translation is an adequate guide to the contents and meaning of Scripture. For centuries, in fact, the church insisted that the Vulgate *was the official text of the Bible*, and basing one’s thought on the original Hebrew and

Greek texts was dangerous. One might run afoul of the Inquisition.¹ The relatively few people who could read Hebrew and Greek were often said to have committed *errors*.

In later years, especially around the time of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century, there was a struggle over translating the Bible into the various languages of Europe, which the Roman Church opposed. Over time, these translations often came to be regarded as *the accurate and official text*. German-speakers followed the translation of Luther. English-speakers accorded authority to “the Authorized Version,” often called the “King James Version,” since it was James I, head of the Church of England, who authorized the translation. I have even today encountered students who insisted that I was not teaching from the true Bible—the King James Version.

This history is extremely odd for followers of a religion of “the Book.” Even Jews who do not know Hebrew know that the *real* Bible is in Hebrew (with some brief portions in Aramaic). Not all Muslims know Arabic, but they know that the *real* Quran is in Arabic. As far as I know, only Christians accord official status to translations.

To read a translation is to put a barrier between the eyes and the text. To borrow a phrase from Paul, it is seeing “through a glass darkly.” A translation may in fact be adequate for faith and morals, but it impedes precise understanding of the text and thus is inadequate for scholarly investigation.

On occasion, therefore, I shall decide that there is something that I cannot explain without turning to the Greek, and in some discussions we shall have to take up the meanings and nuances of Greek words.

1. For example, in the sixteenth century Fray Luis de León was prosecuted and imprisoned because someone accused him of preferring the Hebrew text to the Latin. See Henry Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition: A Historical Revision* (London: Folio Society, 1998), 128–29. The book was originally published in 1965.

I hope that this will at least make readers conscious of the fact that a translation is not the text of the Bible and that they will see that the effort involved in discussing the original meaning of the text is worthwhile.

Real Letters, Not Academic Essays

When in the course of our study we meet difficulties of consistency and clarity, we should remember that Paul's letters are real letters. He responds to questions, issues, and actions that have arisen in the course of his ministry. He and the recipients of the letters knew what was going on and what had already happened. Sometimes we cannot discover what they all knew (the presuppositions of the letters), and thus there are sometimes difficulties that remain even after diligent study. There are some things that we shall never know.

Paul's letters were not essays on selected themes that were revised and polished at leisure, nor did the editor who collected the letters rewrite them to take out rough patches. We meet, for example, *anacolutha*. An anacoluthon is a sentence in which there is an abrupt change part of the way through that renders the whole thing inconsistent and the meaning dubious. The most famous anacoluthon is Gal. 2:4–5, which leaves us uncertain as to whether or not the “false brothers” persuaded Paul that Titus should be circumcised (see p. 479 n. 5). This counts in favor of the view that Paul did not revise his letters to a noticeable degree and that the editor did not decide to “improve” the text. We also note that frequently—very frequently—Paul seems to end a subject and to be on to the next item, only to return to the previous topic. I do not mean that his letters are rambling and incoherent, but rather that they were not polished by careful revision.

My picture of Paul as he dictated—which cannot be proved—is this: he paced, hands behind his back, forehead forward, and dictated

in bursts—not in the measured tones that reflect that the letter was previously composed in his mind. The mention of one word will call to mind another word, and this may lead to a digression. He is sometimes heated as he dictates—angry at an opponent, reacting vigorously against what he regards as personal slurs. In this mood he sometimes curses and threatens. But he is never unmindful of the wisdom of conciliation, and he treats the recipients with respect—sometimes with strong praise.

Scholars often depict Paul as an academic, who wrote his letters the way we write our books: texts spread out around us so that we can look up suitable points, completing a portion of a book or essay, and then going back over it three or ten times or more, trying to get it in order and ensuring that it says just what we intend.

I wish to repeat that it is very dubious that Paul traveled with the twenty or so heavy scrolls that the Hebrew Bible in Greek required. If he had them with him, it is unlikely that he could have taken the time to unroll one after the other, looking for related quotations to combine. It is also unlikely that he was able to rent a room in a synagogue and borrow its scrolls. He was punished in synagogues; it is improbable that the synagogue leaders would lend him their valuable possessions. And, in any case, he did not need to reread the Bible to know what it said. He could recall it.

In each city he visited, Paul probably had a small room, possibly littered with pieces of leather, certainly not covered with scrolls, where he worked with his hands, told visitors about Christ, and occasionally dictated to a scribe. And he did not have a lot of time. He worked “night and day” to support himself by his trade (1 Thess. 2:9) and to convert gentiles. Having succeeded in one place, he raced on to the next. He was in a hurry. He needed to win believers in the west before the Lord returned. His churches behind him had troubles that bothered them, and so sometimes he had to drop everything else

and speed off to put out a brush fire or a rebellion. He wrote, "I am under daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches" (2 Cor. 11:28).

He did not have the leisure that we like to think scholars should have—but usually do not. Every scholar who has had to run to get to class after a committee meeting should be able to sympathize with the pressure that Paul was under.

Two Interpretive Threads

Finally, in our path through the letters we shall pay special attention to two interwoven threads: (1) the relationship between "justification [or righteousness] by faith" and "being one person with Christ Jesus" and (2) change and development.

The importance of the first of these threads will need little emphasis. In Galatians, Philippians, and Romans, Paul discusses "righteousness by faith, not by works of law" and also "being one person with Christ" (sometimes "being baptized into Christ," sometimes "dying with Christ," sometimes "being found in him"). For more than one hundred years scholars have debated the significance and relative importance of these two themes, and we shall pay special attention to them in this study.

The second thread is more controversial. Scholarly discussion of "development" has been equally long, and the results have been unsatisfying. I discussed this topic briefly above (p. xxix), and I shall not say much more about it here. We should expect in advance that Paul's mind was not entirely static: no one's is. Moreover, Paul lived in a dynamic, fluid environment. A partially new religion ("partially" because in many respects Christianity depends on Judaism) was just starting, and there was a certain amount of trial and error in the founding and instruction of new communities. There was also a new audience: former pagans who had just begun to worship the God of

Israel. Paul's thought was hammered out in debates with other leaders (such as Peter and James in Jerusalem) and with his often contentious converts (especially those in Galatia and Corinth). He could hardly have thought through all the issues in advance, since many of the problems arose during the course of his ministry. Paul's message, it will turn out, had effects that surprised him and raised questions that caused him to think. His responses to unforeseen issues are the most interesting parts of his letters.

If he had actually been a theological Johnny-one-note, he would have said the same thing over and over again and merely applied it to new situations. But that is not what we read in his letters. We see instead a great variety of argumentation and the emergence of numerous basic principles in the context of debates with other apostles and conflicts with his converts.

I shall propose that we see a form of development not only in eschatology ("thought about last things"), where it is often been found, but also in his thought about the inner spiritual life of Christians and the way in which believers begin to be transformed. We shall see this development as we study suffering, receiving the Spirit, and being one person with Christ.

"Development" does not mean "retraction." On the contrary, I find no instance in which Paul retracts what he earlier thought, but rather a good deal of *movement* toward a richer, fuller description of the meaning of life in Christ Jesus.

1 Thessalonians, Part 1: A Tutorial on Analyzing Paul's Letters

This chapter is devoted to explaining a technique for studying Paul's letters that will involve looking at passages from different points of view. I take 1 Thessalonians as the object of this exercise because, on wide agreement, it is the earliest of the letters that we have. The significance of the main topics of the letter will be taken up in the next chapter. First, however, a brief introduction to the city to which Paul wrote.

Thessalonica was a substantial and prosperous city, the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia, which was in the southeastern part of Europe. For administrative purposes, the Romans combined the former kingdom of Macedonia and the northern part of the Greek mainland into one province, "Macedonia." The southern parts of Greece were in the province of "Achaia." Thessalonica was the major port in Macedonia, and it was also on the *via Egnatia*, the first Roman road built outside of Italy (in 148 BCE) and one of the major

routes from Rome to its eastern provinces. From Thessalonica, one could travel ENE to Philippi and Byzantium (modern Istanbul) or south to Larissa, Athens, and Corinth. The nearest port in Asia was Troas, in the northwestern part of Asia Minor.

In Paul's day, the population of Thessalonica was mixed: there were Macedonians, Greeks, Romans, Jews, and probably people of other ethnic origins as well.¹

According to Acts, Paul first entered Europe by sailing from Troas to Philippi (16:9-12). From Philippi, he traveled by the coast road southwest through Apollonia to Thessalonica (17:1). This corresponds perfectly to geography, and it is doubtless what Paul did. In Philippi, he founded a church and had a problem with the law and the civic authorities (which we shall consider in the chapter on Philippians).

From there he went to Thessalonica, where he also established a church. He left, probably after only a short stay. He then traveled south to Athens (Acts 17:15). In Athens, however, he was anxious about the state of the congregation in Thessalonica, apparently having heard of persecution. He sent Timothy, who reported back to him on the morale and conditions of the converts, and then he wrote 1 Thessalonians (see 1 Thess. 3:1-6). It is the earliest surviving Pauline letter, and it is also the earliest Christian document that we possess. (We recall that the Gospels refer to earlier events, but that they were composed after Paul's letters.)

First Thessalonians is a fairly short letter, and it is also generally regarded as minor in comparison with the major letters—Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians. It is nevertheless extremely important, since it gives us not only the earliest information about

1. See N. G. L. Hammond, "Thessalonica," *OCD*2, 1062 and *OCD*3, 1510; Raymond Chevallier, *Roman Roads* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 140; F. W. Beare, "Thessalonians, First," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. G. A. Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), DB 4:662f.; map, p. ix.

Christianity, but also a vivid description of aspects of Paul's early missionary activity. Moreover, most of its topics were developed in sometimes complicated ways in Paul's later letters, and it is very valuable to see them in their earlier, simple form.

First Thessalonians also gives us an excellent opportunity to explore the dangers and difficulties people faced if they accepted Paul's message. This, in turn, helps us understand the cultural context in which he worked.

Apart from the letter's intrinsic interest, it will also serve very well as an example of some of the modes of analysis that can be applied to Paul's letters. We shall spend a few pages on analyzing the sequence of events and the presuppositions of the letter—the knowledge that Paul and the Thessalonians shared. We shall conduct this sort of investigation more briefly when we study the other letters, hoping that readers will apply to other letters the analysis that we go through together in this letter.

We shall, therefore, look at 1 Thessalonians in some detail. The plan of the following discussion is this:

1. Explaining of the form of the letter, which applies to Paul's other letters as well.
2. Reconstructing the sequence of events that led up to the letter.
3. Identifying the presuppositions of the letter.
4. Listing Paul's standard views and presuppositions, which will let the individuality of each letter stand out.

In the next chapter, we shall deal with the meat of the letter, the substantive topics.

The Letter Form

All of Paul's letters have the same basic parts, except for Galatians, which is missing one (the thanksgiving).

1. His own name and those of the colleagues who are with him: "Paul, Silvanus and Timothy" (1 Thess. 1:1).
2. The address: "to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:1).
3. Opening benediction: "Grace to you and peace" (1:1).
4. The thanksgiving: "We always give thanks to God for all of you . . ." (1:2). The thanksgiving always indicates something of the coming contents of the letter. In this case, we note persecution (1:6), conversion from idolatry (1:9), and waiting for Jesus' return from heaven (1:10). There is some doubt about where the thanksgiving ends, but I shall assume it to end in 1:10.
5. The body: 2:1—5:11. Paul's discussion of topics is seldom perfectly organized; he frequently seems to drop a point only to come back to it later. For this reason, an outline of the subjects in the body of the letter will not follow the sequence of verses precisely.
6. Closing admonitions: 5:12–23: "respect those who labor among you," and so on.
7. Concluding benediction and greetings: 5:23–28: "May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely. . . ."

The Sequence of Events

Each of Paul's letters (except Romans) is part of a continuing conversation, and it is most helpful to try to reconstruct the history of Paul's relationship with each church. This is done partly by simply noting what Paul says about previous events: "When I was there I . . ."

or “I have heard that you . . .” and so on. Such direct comments are essential to the task of reconstructing the conversation. I shall present the chronological information briefly, without narrating what Paul or Timothy or the Thessalonians said or did at each point. Reading each of the cited passages will maximize comprehension.

1. The founding visit: 1 Thess. 1:5–10; 2:1–13. In this case I shall give a little detail about what he says about his message to the Thessalonians: he spoke in words, but his message also came “in power” and “in the Holy Spirit” (1 Thess. 1:5). “Power” possibly implies miracles; “in the Holy Spirit” may imply charismatic gifts. We shall see that all of Paul’s converts received the Spirit. The Spirit (of God or of Christ) is a ubiquitous theme in his letters.
2. Paul had learned that the Thessalonians were suffering persecution (2:14), and he had long wished to visit them (2:17–18).
3. Paul sent Timothy to encourage them, fearing that persecution had shaken their faith (3:1–5).
4. Timothy returned and reported that all was well (3:6–8).
5. Paul nevertheless continued to worry about them (3:10).
6. Paul then wrote and sent the present letter. We do not know who took it to Thessalonica.

Major Presuppositions: What Paul and the Thessalonians Knew When Paul Wrote 1 Thessalonians

The first interest in discussing presuppositions or shared knowledge is to identify the circumstances that are specifically relevant to 1 Thessalonians, that is, those that reveal “what was going on” between Paul and the Thessalonian church. This exercise involves “mirror reading” (p. 165), inferring information about the recipients from

the advice and concerns of the author. Near the end of the list we shall begin to see some of Paul's standard theological and ethical presuppositions, including some that are related generally to his mission but not specifically to the situation of the Thessalonians.

The difference between "specific" and "general" is very important in analyzing Paul's letters. Paul gives lots of general admonitions, and he makes some standard points very frequently. We should not read too much into these comments in assessing the situation behind one of his letters. His frequent statements are, of course, important to him, and they reveal many of his own assumptions and values, but they are not necessarily at issue in the letter.

Making this distinction requires us to know what is specific and what is general, and we learn this only by reading all of Paul's letters and also other literature from his time and place. Some admonitions were as common as "farewell," "have a good day," "take care," and the like. Such statements as these do not imply that the person to whom they are addressed usually had *bad* days or was *not* careful.

We now proceed with the search for knowledge that the letter as we have it *presupposes*, concentrating on those points that are specific to the situation in Thessalonica, but noting also some of Paul's standard and frequently repeated views. The following numbered list is divided into categories: Beyond Doubt, or "doubtless" (the statements that are unquestionably of specific importance in 1 Thessalonians); Probable (statements that are probably specific to the situation in Thessalonica); Possible (statements whose precise meaning is in doubt or issues that may or may not have been of specific importance in Thessalonica); Standard (views that Paul himself certainly held as presuppositions, but which do not seem to be at issue in 1 Thessalonians).

Beyond Doubt: Passages That are Doubtless Specific to the Situation in Thessalonica

In 1:9–10, Paul writes, “For the people of those regions [Macedonia and Achaia, v. 7] report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.”

From these two verses we derive the following background information, knowledge that Paul and the Thessalonians shared:

1. The converts were gentiles (non-Jews); that is, they had been pagans, people who participated in the common Greco-Roman worship of idols. This form of religion is described more fully in the next chapter.
2. They had converted by “turning from” idols and “turning to” the God of Israel.
3. As part of their conversion, they accepted Jesus as God’s Son.
4. They thought that Jesus would soon return.
5. “Wrath”—God’s judgment and punishment of immorality and false worship—would soon visit the world.
6. Paul had taught them, and they believed, that by accepting the true God and his Son they would be saved from the coming wrath.

Points 4, 5, and 6 are supported by further verses: 4:16 (the Lord [Jesus] will return); 5:2 (the Lord will come like a thief in the night); 5:9 (“we” are destined not for wrath but for salvation through “our Lord Jesus”).

This is rather a lot to derive from two short verses, but once these points are seen they are self-evident. The obviousness of the result reveals the importance of the enterprise: by paying close attention to

the text and asking what it implies we acquire very useful information about the Thessalonians and the letter that Paul sent to them. We now turn to a second set of verses and ask what lies behind them.

In 1:6, Paul writes that the Thessalonians had become “imitators of us and of the Lord, for in persecution² [they] received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit.” There are numerous other references to persecution or suffering. In 2:2, he refers to the opposition that he had faced previously in Philippi, which led to his suffering. A few verses later (2:14–16), he states that the Thessalonians suffered and thus imitated the fate of the Christian believers in Judea (the province that included Jerusalem).

Who were the persecutors? The Thessalonians suffered at the hands of their own compatriots (fellow pagans), just as the Judean Christians suffered at the hands of their compatriots (the Jewish residents of Judea) (2:14). The latter are accused of having killed Jesus and the prophets. During Paul’s mission to Macedonia, Jews hindered Paul from preaching to gentiles (2:16). He may have counted this as a form of persecution. There is a further reference to persecution in 3:3–4.

From these verses (1 Thess. 1:6—3:4) we learn:

7. That Jesus (and prophets before him) had been killed.
8. That the Jewish Christians in Judea were persecuted by non-Christian Jews in Judea.
9. That Paul was persecuted in his mission field, specifically Philippi. If we combine 2:16 (Jews hindered Paul’s conversion of gentiles) with 2:2 (Paul met opposition in Philippi, which led to suffering) we may conclude that local Jews in some of the cities in which Paul preached made some sort of trouble for him. *Why*

2. For “in persecution” the NRSV and NIV have “in spite of persecution,” although the Greek text does not have an equivalent of “spite of.” On this translation, which I believe to be in error, see below, chap. 9, p. 206–7.

local Jews objected to Paul's conversion of gentiles will be a topic for later consideration.

10. That after they accepted Paul's message, the Thessalonian converts were persecuted by unconverted gentiles.
11. That Paul construed his own suffering and that of his converts as "imitation" of Jesus and the first Christians in Judea.

The reader who wishes to learn the proposed technique of analysis should read the passages until all eleven of these "presuppositions" or "points known to both Paul and his converts when he wrote" are clear. I shall now lay out evidence and further presuppositions without quoting the passages. Full comprehension, however, will depend on reading each passage.

12. Paul had learned of their suffering and had been worried about how they were bearing up. Timothy had been there since Paul left and had returned with a reassuring report. Paul was still a little anxious, however, and 1 Thessalonians was intended to "restore whatever [was] lacking in [their] faith" (1 Thess. 3:5-10).
13. First Thessalonians 4:13-18 is one of the most significant passages in 1 Thessalonians. It reveals that one or more of the Thessalonian converts had died and that the survivors were worried lest the dead miss out when the Lord returns. This in turn is very revealing about what Paul had taught them. He had obviously said that they should await the return of the Lord from heaven (as in 1:9-10). He either had not said, or had not emphasized, that if they died first they would nevertheless be saved. He now gives them the *additional information* that when the Lord returns the "dead in Christ will rise first" (4:16; note also 5:10, "whether we are awake or asleep"—that is, alive or dead.³)

Thus, his main message had not been “believe in Christ, and when you die you will be saved,” but rather “believe in Christ, and *when he returns* you will be saved.” The second formulation leaves room for doubt about the fate of dead believers. The early Christian *eschatological expectation* will be addressed as a major topic in chapter 8. But here we see clearly that Paul taught that Jesus would return *very* soon.

Probable: Passages That Are Probably Specific to the Situation in Thessalonica

14. The references to the need to keep working at their ordinary jobs in 4:11–12 and 5:14 probably assume that Timothy had told him that some of his converts had stopped working. Paul does not explicitly say that the Thessalonians were not working with their hands and that they were dependent on others. But why should he admonish them about these things, as he does in 4:11–12, unless they needed it, that is, unless he had learned that some of the Thessalonians were no longer working, but had started begging, or had otherwise become dependent on others? I classify this as “Probable,” however, rather than as “Beyond Doubt,” because it is conceivable that ceasing ordinary tasks while waiting for the Lord had occurred elsewhere, that Paul knew of it, and that his caution to the Thessalonians was just that: a caution rather than a correction of their own practices.

3. “Fall asleep” is a standard Pauline euphemism for “die.” See, for example, 4:13–15, where some translations have “died” for the Greek “fallen asleep”; in Greek the word “died” appears at the beginning of 4:14 and “asleep” at the end. “Asleep” also occurs in verses 13 and 15. See also 1 Cor. 7:39; 11:30; 15:6, 18, 20, 51.

**Possible: Passages That are Possibly Specific to the
Situation in Thessalonica**

15. In 2:3-12 there is a long defense of Paul's own behavior. He did not speak from "deceit or impure motives," and he did not employ "trickery" (2:3). He did not use flattery or any other device to disguise greed (2:5). On the contrary, his conduct was "pure, upright, and blameless" (2:10).

Here we must be unsure about precisely what lies behind Paul's statements. I shall suggest three possibilities: either (a) he had learned from Timothy that someone had accused him of greed and exploitation; (b) he had heard that other missionaries (whether Christian or non-Christian) were greedy and exploitative, and he wished to point out that he was different; or (c) he was very sensitive on issues of money, praise, and motives and reacted defensively to the least little thing.

It is puzzling that Paul spent so many verses on self-defense but that in this letter there are no specific signs of enmity or hostility toward him. He does not refer explicitly to accusations against him or to an anti-Paul party within the church. Moreover, he and the Macedonians (converts in Philippi and Thessalonica) remained on the best of terms and trusted one another in all things, as we shall see at the end of the next chapter.

In Galatians and the Corinthian correspondence, where Paul is also quite defensive, it is clear that he was actually under attack. In 1 Thessalonians we have defensiveness with no explicit or clear sign of an attack on his character. This leaves us uncertain as to the cause of the long passage justifying his behavior. It is conceivable that part of this self-defense, 2:9 (he supported himself by working), besides being a reply to any possible accusations of greed and exploitation

of his converts (2:5), also has the function of encouraging the Thessalonians to keep working at their jobs (point 14).

Consequently, I am inclined to attribute his self-justification and defensiveness to explanations (b) and (c) above: he suspected that other missionaries were exploitative and he was very sensitive to any possible criticism.

16. First Thessalonians 4:1-8 reveals that Paul had given the Thessalonians some ethical instructions regarding sex. Possibly he still worried a little and thought they needed reminding, or perhaps Timothy reported some problems. It is also possible that this passage is simply a reminder about sexual purity and does not reflect a specific problem in Thessalonica; Paul often includes sexual admonitions in general catalogues of correct behavior (such as 1 Cor. 5:11; 6:9). It is certain that Paul was always concerned about sexual ethics. The only point that is uncertain is whether or not some of the Thessalonians had engaged in behavior of which he disapproved. The length of the passage counts in favor of a specific issue, but the phrase “as in fact you are doing” (4:1) indicates that this is only a general reminder.
17. First Thessalonians 5:12-13 (“respect those who labor among you”) probably shows that there were *local* leaders, and it is possible that Timothy reported that they were not receiving enough respect. First Thessalonians 3:6 makes it doubtful that 5:12-13 implies lack of respect for Paul and Timothy. That leaders should be respected was a standard view; the only question is whether or not there was a specific problem in Thessalonica.

Standard: Paul's Habitual Views, Not Specific to the
Situation in Thessalonica

18. Two verses (5:19–20) reveal that Paul thought that the Spirit was active in the congregation and that it inspired prophecy. Verse 19 (“do not quench the Spirit”) probably is not a response to a specific act of preventing charismatic speech but only a general admonition.
19. In 1:1, 1:5, and 2:18, we see that Paul presupposed the existence of spiritual powers: God, the Holy Spirit, and Satan.
20. Several verses reveal Paul’s presupposition of another general theological point: God exercises control of people’s lives (which is often called “determination” or “predetermination”): 1:4 (“he has chosen you”); 3:11 (God directs Paul’s own journeys); 5:9 (God has destined “us” for salvation). As we noted above (pp. 51–53), in the ancient world it was possible to hold this view while *also* thinking that humans were responsible for their own decisions. Logically, free will and divine determination are directly opposed to each other; in real life, people to this day actually hold both views simultaneously, and in Paul’s day almost everyone did.
21. In 4:9–10, he reminds his converts to “Love one another.” This is only a customary motif. We note that the admonition is merely to “do so more and more.”

A complete analysis of chapter 5 would reveal more of Paul’s standard presuppositions and views, most of which are not issues in the first four chapters. Some of the points in chapter 5 pick up previous concerns: salvation will apply to both the living and the dead (5:10; cf. 4:14–16); people should not be idlers but should work (5:14; cf. 4:11–12). Most of the rest of chapter 5 seems to me to consist of

standard Pauline admonitions and reminders. If they were standard, they certainly tell us something about Paul's presuppositions, but they do not necessarily tell us anything in particular about the church in Thessalonica. In this chapter, the major emphases are these:

22. The end is near, and people should be ready: "awake and sober" are metaphors for "ready"; "drunk" is a metaphor for "not ready" (5:1-11). It is doubtful that the Thessalonians were having difficulty with drunkenness. Support for seeing this language as metaphorical comes from Rom. 13:11-13: "wake from sleep"; "live . . . as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness." Paul was, of course, against drinking too much alcohol (1 Cor. 5:11; 6:10), but the contrast between wakefulness and drunkenness leads us to think that being drunk was a metaphor for not being prepared for the return of the Lord, who would return without warning, which is the principal concern of 1 Thess. 5:1-11.
23. People should live lives of love and peace; they should not repay evil for evil; they should rejoice; they should abstain from evil; they should be morally blameless (5:12-24).
24. I wish now to note a "negative presupposition," one that Paul did not have. First Thessalonians 1:7-9 does not reflect evangelistic activity in nearby cities on the part of the Thessalonians. "The word of the Lord has sounded forth from you" (1:8) refers not to their sending missionaries to found other congregations, but rather to the spread of news about the Thessalonians' conversion (see v. 9). Paul, that is, did not expect that his converts would become apostles. Local leaders and local prophets (5:12-13, 20) should guide and build up the church in Thessalonica. The apostles, who founded new congregations by preaching the gospel, constituted a breed apart. This will become even clearer in 1 Corinthians.

Major Presuppositions: Summary

We shall now summarize the evidence about presuppositions. There are two principal categories: the situation in Thessalonica and Paul's standard and habitual views.

The Situation in Thessalonica

Points 1–6 reveal that the Thessalonians were converts from idolatry to Paul's main message: the God of Israel alone deserved worship, he had sent his Son to save people from the time of judgment, the Lord [Jesus] would soon return, and the converts would be saved while others would be visited by God's wrath.

Paul had heard, however, that the Thessalonians were suffering under persecution, and he had sent Timothy to confirm that they were demonstrating faith by remaining steadfast. As a result of Timothy's visit, his fears were largely allayed, but he still thought that he needed to bolster them further (point 12). Part of this bolstering is indicated by points 7–11 above: Paul explains that suffering was part of the lot of believers in Jesus. Jesus himself had suffered persecution; he, Paul, and his companions were persecuted; the suffering of the Thessalonians was imitation of the Lord and of his apostle, Paul.

From Timothy's report, Paul learned that new issues had arisen. The most important was that one or more of the converts had died, and Timothy had told Paul that the survivors were afraid that the dead would not be saved when the Lord returned. Paul wrote to assure them that "the dead in Christ would rise first" and that the Lord would save both living and dead Christians (point 13).

It is probable that some of the Thessalonians had quit their regular jobs and were living off of charity (point 14). We may assume that this was related to their expectation that the Lord would return very, very soon. If so, perhaps the thing to do was to sit, pray, and wait.

There are a few puzzles about the situation in Thessalonica as reported by Timothy. Was there suspicion that Paul was greedy and exploitative (point 15)? Were any of the converts transgressing against Paul's instructions regarding sexual ethics (point 16)? Were the Thessalonians displaying inadequate respect for local leaders (point 17)?

Paul's Standard and Habitual Views

Many of the points just listed, besides being specific to Thessalonica, were also among Paul's most basic views: only one God; salvation through Christ; the expectation—or requirement—of suffering; the return of the Lord and the salvation of all believers, whether living or dead; the need to keep working and to be socially respectable; sexual morality; and respect for leaders. In addition to these, we see his belief in spiritual powers and the activity of the Spirit in the lives of believers (points 18 and 19); God's control of events (20); the virtue of love (21); the need to be ready for the Lord's return (22); moral blamelessness, including not repaying evil for evil (23).

We shall now look more closely at the main topics of our letter: Paul's "simple gospel"; Christology; faith and righteousness; suffering, persecution and paganism; the expectation that the Lord would soon return; sexual ethics; and the attack on Jews in 2:13–16.

1 Thessalonians, Part 2: Main Topics

Paul's Simple Gospel

I call Paul's gospel "simple" to contrast it with the sometimes complicated forms that his message takes when he meets substantial opposition from other leaders of the Christian movement and occasionally when he meets serious arguments from his congregations. We shall see that what is "complicated" or "difficult" to us is really Paul's mode of argumentation, which is that of an ancient Jew. *His basic points remain fairly simple throughout.* First Thessalonians provides an excellent opportunity to see what some of them were, without elaborate arguments to cloud our view.

This is an expanded discussion of the main points of Paul's message, which I listed above (pp. 114–23).

1. Gentiles had to convert *from* the worship of idols *to* the worship of the God of Israel, the "living and true God" (1 Thess. 1:9).

This will be the subject of one of our major elaborations, where we shall link turning from idols to persecution.

2. His converts should not only believe in the God of Israel, they should accept Jesus Christ as his Son, believe that he died on their behalf and that God raised him, and wait for his return (1:10). Below we shall very briefly consider “accept his Son” and “believe that God raised him”; “waiting for his return” will be one of our major topics in this chapter.
3. Although Jews who entered the Christian movement did not need to turn from idols to the true God, they did need to accept Jesus Christ as God’s Son and their savior, put their faith in him, and await his return.
4. At Jesus’ return there would be a great judgment. Those who believed in him would escape God’s wrath and have eternal life.
5. While waiting, the believers should live blamelessly (5:23; 3:13; cf. Paul’s own conduct, 2:10), especially exhibiting *love* for others (3:12; 4:9; 5:8). Below we shall begin a study of Paul’s ethics, principally sexual ethics, which he discusses in 4:1–8.

All of the above main points of Paul’s “simple gospel” become not only more complicated but also more profound in Paul’s later letters, after he had experienced difficulties that had not arisen when he wrote 1 Thessalonians.

In connection with the above list of the main points of his apostolic message, I wish to discuss very briefly what will be some of the most important points of his theology later: Christology and such key words as *faith*, *hope*, and *righteousness*. It will be useful to note what they look like in his first letter.

Some Important Theological Topics

Christology

“Teaching about Christ,” or “theorizing about Christ,” potentially includes five topics: Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, return, and relationship to God and humanity. The reader of Paul’s letters finds little about Jesus’ life, and there is nothing at all in 1 Thessalonians. In this letter, Paul even says surprisingly little about Jesus’ death: the Jews killed him (1:14f.), and he died “for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him” (5:10). In later letters, Paul will discuss Jesus’ death as an atoning sacrifice, but 1 Thessalonians does not explain precisely how Jesus’ death benefits “us.” We should assume that he had said more about this when he was in Thessalonica, but we have no further information.

Jesus’ Resurrection

Although in 1 Thessalonians Paul does not say much about Jesus’ death, he refers to or implies *Jesus’ resurrection* five times: God raised him from the dead (1:10); Jesus died and rose again (4:14); he is still alive (implied by 2:19 and 5:10, 23). Paul’s original message must have emphasized Jesus’ resurrection very strongly, since the Thessalonians awaited his return. This we shall save for later treatment, here noting only that Jesus’ return was the object of the Thessalonians’ *hope* (1:3; 4:13; 5:8).

Faith and Righteousness

Faith in Christ and righteousness through faith in Christ are so important in the history of Paulinism—both in some of his later letters and in subsequent Christianity—that we shall note the occurrences of the key words in 1 Thessalonians. Here I must explain that examining

the terminology for “faith” and “belief” or “believing” in Paul’s Greek requires us to look at only one Greek root: words beginning with *pist-*. English does not have a verb that is cognate with the noun “faith,” so English uses “believe” instead. Examining *pist-* involves us in looking at a diversity of English terms. Similarly, English does not have a verb that is cognate with the noun “righteousness,” and uses “justify” instead. In this case, we examine all the Greek words that begin with *dik-*.

Pisteuein (believe or have faith), *pistis* (faith), *pistos* (faithful): In 1 Thessalonians, the noun “faith” is the general quality of remaining true, especially during persecution. It is the opposite of “doubt” or “wavering.” The precise meaning of “faith” is not clear in 1:2 or 5:8, but it is elsewhere. In 3:2, Paul reveals that he was worried about how persecution was affecting his converts and that he had sent Timothy to strengthen them “for the sake of [their] faith,” “so that no one would be shaken by these persecutions” (3:3). This meaning, “remaining true despite hardship,” appears also in 3:5, 6, 7, 10. The last verse reveals that Paul had worried that they might be a little lacking in faith, which in context is the ability to withstand persecution. “Faith in” appears in 1:8—faith in God.

The verb “believe” (*pisteuein*) is used in its participial form, “believing,” as a noun¹ describing Christian converts. A fairly literal translation of this verbal noun would be “the believing ones.” In common English, we use the noun “believer” or a clause, “those who believe,” to translate this usage: 1:7 (believers in Macedonia and Achaia); 2:10, 13 (you believers). Once the verb indicates the content of Christian faith: 4:14 (“we believe that Jesus died and rose again”). This verb is also used of Paul and his colleagues to mean “entrusted”: 2:4 (we have been entrusted with the gospel). The adjective “faithful”

1. Technically, Paul uses a substantive participle, like the English gerund.

(*pistos*) is used of God, or possibly Christ, to mean “trustworthy”: 5:24 (“the one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this”).

Most of the words derived from *dik-* (the language of righteousness or justification) are missing from 1 Thessalonians: *dikaïos*, righteous; *dikaïosynē*, righteousness; *dikaïoun*, to justify; *dikaïōma*, just requirement or righteous action; *dikaïōsis*, vindication or acquittal, are all missing. There is only one occurrence of the word meaning “right” or “just.” The adverb *dikaïōs*, righteously or justly, appears in 2:10, where Paul says that he acted “purely, righteously, and blamelessly” while in Thessalonica (many translations render these adverbs as adjectives).

The principal point of this exercise is to show what has *not yet happened*: “faith” and “righteousness,” and their cognates, are used in 1 Thessalonians in very ordinary ways: fidelity, trust, trustworthiness, lack of doubt, and holding a firm conviction are the meanings of “faith” and its cognates (the *pist-* root), and “uprightly” is the only example of “righteousness” and its cognates (the *dik-* root). The two words are not closely connected (as in “righteousness by faith”). They do not yet carry the special significance and meanings that they will acquire in Galatians, Philippians, and Romans, where they are terms by which Paul sets his gospel over against that of some of his opponents. I do not mean that “faith” and “uprightly” are unimportant in 1 Thessalonians. On the contrary, they relate to some of his main points: people should put their faith in God, be faithful despite persecution, and live uprightly.

Other Important Topics

Suffering, Persecution and Paganism

Categories of Persecution

Since persecution comes up in various contexts in Paul's letters, I shall offer a brief categorization here, which I hope will prevent confusion later. For various reasons, some groups persecuted other groups. The following is not a full treatment of the theme of persecution in Paul's letters, and further points will appear later.

1. Sometimes gentiles persecuted their compatriots who converted to Christianity. The most obvious motive is that the converts refused to participate in the civic religious practices that were seen as safeguarding each city. Jews also refused, but they were protected by special legal privileges (above, pp. 62-68; 80-81). In Acts 19:23-41 there is a colorful story about how the Christian missionaries were threatening the livelihood of artisans in Ephesus who sold miniature silver shrines of the temple of Artemis. I believe that for leading citizens to break the "contract" with the gods and goddesses of the city was a weightier issue. In any case, sometimes gentiles persecuted other gentiles for becoming Christian.
2. Gentiles in each city might also have persecuted Paul and his colleagues because they were leading citizens away from their duty to worship the gods of the city.
3. Jews (for example, Paul himself, in his earlier career) sometimes persecuted other Jews who accepted the Christian message, as well as the Jewish apostles who preached it. The rationale for this sort of persecution may have been the view that the Christian mission was a rogue cult, that it was damaging Judaism and

misleading gentiles by telling them that they could worship the God of Israel without becoming Jewish (by being circumcised and observing the law given by God). We shall meet this cause of persecution when we study Galatians.

4. Some Jews may also have thought that Rome would not like an eschatological cult that preached the end of the present order, and that Romans would probably not distinguish between Jews and Jewish Christians if they decided that the Christian movement was a threat to the peace of the empire. (There is a fuller discussion of this motive below, pp. 194-95; 494-95.)

In 1 Thessalonians there is clear evidence of category 1: Gentiles persecuted other gentiles who converted to Christianity (1 Thess. 1:6-7; 2:14). Category 3 also makes an appearance: Jews persecuted the apostles who offered gentiles the opportunity of worshipping the God of Israel while not teaching them to observe the Jewish law (1 Thess. 2:16).

In this case as in others, “persecution” might be called “harassment” (as we shall see below).

The Social and Religious Context of Persecution

In 1 Thessalonians, more verses are devoted to the discussion of suffering and persecution than to any other topic, and this also appears to have been the issue that made Paul most anxious: would his converts waver under duress? We have just seen in summary form that in Thessalonica gentiles were persecuting other gentiles who accepted Christ, presumably because they gave up idolatry, which was part of the contract between citizens and their gods: people worshipped their gods, and the gods protected the city.

It will be helpful to describe in more detail paganism, the prevailing religion of the gentile world, which Paul’s converts had to

turn away from: they “turned from idols to serve a living and true God” (1:9).

First we must consider our own terminology for what Paul called “idolatry,” the “worship of idols.” Since most people worshipped more than one god, idolatry frequently goes by the name “polytheism” (literally, “many godism”), and quite commonly by the term “paganism.” The word *heathenism* was once customary. Modern historians now avoid “heathen” and “heathenism” because they have become clearly pejorative terms and are frequently used of people who are completely irreligious, and sometimes of those who are morally depraved (“he is no better than a heathen”). This would be misleading as a description of the ancient world. Many people now think approximately the same of “pagan” and “paganism.” To some ears, a pagan is someone who does not believe anything and who lacks moral scruples. In this work I use “pagan” in a neutral sense, to mean someone who was not Jewish or Christian.

The reason for wishing to hang on to “pagan” as a good term for the gentiles whom Paul wanted to convert is partly merely that I am conservative and wish to slow down the loss of useful words, but there is also another reason. “Idolaters” is at least equally pejorative, and “polytheists” is not always accurate. Some pagans were philosophical monotheists (people who believed in only one God), or even monists (people who, like the Stoics, believed that everything—humanity, nature and the gods—were all part of one basic reality). I shall give one example of a pagan monotheist, Diotogenes, an early author of uncertain date (third century BCE to second century CE), some of whose work was preserved in an anthology prepared by Stobaeus in the fifth century CE. The intention is to illustrate some the belief of some pagans that there was only one God.

For the Best must be honored by the best man, and the Governing Principle by one who is a governor. So just as God is the Best of those things which are most honorable by nature, likewise the king is the best in the earthly and human realm.²

This view, according to which there is one Greatest Good (the Best), is ultimately Socratic or Platonic. Philosophical monotheism was viewed by many in the ancient world as potentially dangerous, and Socrates was tried and convicted of *atheism*, of persuading young men not to worship the traditional gods, who were generally thought to be the protectors of their cities. It is important to note that this extreme decision came at a time of great danger to Athens, the war with Sparta. In easier times, Greeks were by no means this intolerant.

Most philosophical monotheists participated in the customary acts of worship, which were polytheistic, but we should remember that philosophical monotheism existed, and moreover was important, since it aided the spread of Judaism and Christianity, which were monotheistic not only in theory, but also in practice: they prohibited acts of worship directed toward other gods.³

I use “paganism” and “polytheism” interchangeably, partly to remind the reader of the real situation: most people in Paul’s mission field were polytheists, worshippers of many gods, but some were inclined toward theoretical monotheism; for the latter, “pagan” is the best available term.

After this digression, we proceed to consider what pagan polytheism was. The idols were three-dimensional figures of the

2. Stobaeus 4.7.61; E. R. Goodenough, “The Political Philosophy of Hellenistic Kingship,” *Yale Classical Studies* 1 (1928): 55–102, here 68.

3. On the importance of pagan philosophical monotheism in the triumph of Christianity, see, for example, W. H. C. Frend’s discussion of the *Octavius* by Minucius Felix (2nd–3rd century): “There is no quotation from the New Testament, and Christ is not mentioned once. . . . [M]any members of the Roman professional classes were becoming disillusioned with ancestral paganism, and were seeking in Christianity a monotheist philosophy which could be combined with as much of the pagan classical heritage as possible” (*The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 291f.).

various gods and goddesses of Greek mythology. These statues usually sat in the second room of a two-room temple, though there were also often statues of various gods and goddesses outside of the temple. These figures were beautiful, majestic, and awe-inspiring. They radiated both power and compassion, and people turned to them with prayers and offerings, seeking their assistance with the difficulties of life. Even though people knew that an image was only an image, nevertheless entering the precincts of a temple and sharing in the sacrificial rites was doubtless a profound religious experience, and many people looked at the majestic statues with adoration.

The major festivals of each deity were celebrated by the entire city.⁴ First of all the citizens prepared themselves by bathing in special water. The image of the god was bathed, its clothes were washed or changed, it was taken out of the temple, and then it was marched through the city in a grand and glorious procession, which ended at the altar, where the sacrificial animals were slaughtered and the meat was shared.

Besides the feeling of devotion, the populace feasted and had their fill of red meat, which was otherwise scarce in the ancient world.

There were often “games”—athletic contests. The quadrennial Panhellenic (all-Greek) games at Olympia were in honor of the Olympian Zeus. These games are now the most famous games in the world, and their original connection with the worship of Zeus at a specific Greek city has been forgotten.

Thus pagan religion provided solemn ceremonies, numinous experiences, civic solidarity, the entertainment of a procession, good food, and sometimes the further entertainment of athletic contests.

In chapter four, we gave some hint of how difficult it would be

4. Not all of the elements in this generic description characterized every festival in every city. All, however, were quite common.

for a gentile to give up idolatry,⁵ and now we have seen some of the reasons for that statement.

Except for the God of Israel, the gods of the ancient world did not demand exclusive loyalty. Individuals and communities could worship as many gods as they wished. People and cities had their special gods, but no disloyalty was involved in worshipping others. Nor were temples the sole places where worship was possible. People who were away from home could sacrifice to their gods anywhere.

Religion in the Greco-Roman world was fundamentally local. Local custom governed most worship, and most sacrifices were to the gods of the city. *Myths*, stories of gods in which they act like humans, served to give some sort of unity to a situation that was basically chaotic. Some places gave primacy to the worship of one god, others to the worship of another. Myth related these deities to one another. In Greek myth, Athena was the daughter of Zeus, who emerged from Zeus's head; she had no mother. Originally, however, Athena was of pre-Greek origin. The conquering Greeks simply accepted her and then gave her a relation to the Greek god Zeus in their mythology.⁶

Gods of the same name were worshipped in many different places. Sometimes the cult of a given deity spread from one place to another. Often, however, especially after the conquests of Alexander the Great in the late fourth century BCE, various cities equated their own deities with the gods of the conquerors, but continued the religious rites that they had always practiced. For example, in Magnesia on the Maeander River in western Asia Minor, near Ephesus, a bull, dedicated to Zeus Sosipolis, was bought at the beginning of sowing. In this case, as in many others, the dual name of the god indicates a combination of a Greek (or Roman) god with a local cult. "Zeus Sosipolis" means "Zeus, the savior of the city," Magnesia. The cult

5. See chap. 4, pp. 29, 31.

6. H. J. Rhodes and C. M. Robertson, "Athena", *OCD*2, 138f.

had nothing to do with the Zeus of Homeric myth; his name was simply attached to a pre-Greek agricultural cult.

[The bull] was fed at the public cost and those who traded in the market were told that they were doing a good action in giving him food. He was sacrificed at a time coinciding with the harvest, and the flesh was shared out among all who took part in the festival.⁷

Nilsson continues by explaining that the bull “personifies the standing crop between seed-time and harvest and that the sacrifice is a communion with the vegetation spirit.”⁸

In this case, as in others, the bull was killed and eaten. This aspect of Greco-Roman worship was absolutely standard, and in fact was typical of many ancient religions, including Judaism. People worshipped the gods by killing animals, and in most cases the worshippers then ate all or most of the meat.⁹ Large quadrupeds were very expensive because of the shortage of good pasturage throughout much of the ancient world from Syria to Italy, and so they did double duty: the gods were honored (and, in primitive thought, fed), and the people got to eat red meat, which was otherwise quite rare.

If a family had something to celebrate, the members could take one of their own animals, or buy one, invite their friends to a local shrine, sacrifice the animal to one of the gods, and then feast. If someone wanted to do something religious, he or she would not sit and recite a myth about a god. Doing something religious meant sacrificing and feasting.

Small acts of worship were also common. The gods were invoked on all public occasions, such as assemblies of the city council and

7. Martin Nilsson, *A History of Greek Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1925), 107f.

8. *Ibid.*, 108.

9. In some Asian religions, such as Judaism, some sacrifices were *holocausts*, “whole-burnt offerings,” dedicated entirely to God by being burnt on the altar. The Greeks seldom did anything this expensive.

theatrical performances, and also frequently at home. Religion, in short, was part and parcel of life. People who would not participate at all were cut off from much of the local culture and from many of the pleasures of life.

I wish to repeat that cities allowed Jews to avoid close contact with idolatry. Jews were special for two reasons. One was that Judaism was old. The Greeks and the other inhabitants of the Greco-Roman world were aware that some nations, such as Egypt, were older than Greek civilization, and they respected ancient ancestral traditions. Judaism qualified as ancient and was thus tolerated.¹⁰ Moreover, as we saw in discussing the Diaspora, both Julius Caesar and his adopted heir, eventually named Augustus, gave the Jews numerous benefits, in thanks for the aid that Palestinian Jews gave them.

Thus, Jews lived in the cities of the Greco-Roman world partially on their own terms. They could have an alternative society, since they were allowed to have places of assembly (synagogues), and they were allowed actually to assemble. They did not have to engage in the sorts of activity that seemed to them to conflict with their ancestral customs, and so they could stand apart from idolatry.¹¹

But for others to withdraw from civic life and worship could be construed as something close to what we call “treason.” It was not equivalent to “heresy,” having the wrong opinion, since there were no required theological opinions in the Greco-Roman world. People did not have to swear that they believed in some set of mythological stories or other, and in fact the sophisticated often ridiculed the Homeric myths, which seemed to many people to be outmoded and

10. Note the phrase “their ancient, peculiar custom” in a letter of Augustus quoted by Philo (*Embassy to Gaius* 315), written to protect Jewish customs.

11. The question of the Jews’ precise legal status in Greco-Roman cities is a difficult one. In many of the Greek-speaking cities, they constituted what E. Mary Smallwood calls a *politeuma*, a quasi-autonomous civic unit.” They had residential and other rights in these cities, but only a few Jews were actually citizens of the city. See Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 224–35.

often immoral (because of the sexual activities of the gods in Greek mythology). Two centuries later, Rome would not mind if Christians mumbled “I don’t believe in this” while they sacrificed to Jupiter, indicating loyalty to the empire. But they had to sacrifice.¹² The issue was loyalty to *custom and practice*, unless people were excused because of their own ancient ancestral customs, as were the Jews.¹³

It is important to note that if people in Paul’s day were suspected of disloyalty, it was disloyalty to the city-state, not to the “Roman Empire,” which remained a rather vague entity into the third century. In Paul’s day, the city-state was what really mattered to the peoples of Greece and Asia Minor. See notes 13 and 14.

Gentile Christians could not claim that they had this sort of exemption; they were not yet claiming that they were the true Israel. Herein lies the explanation of one of the types of *persecution* during the Pauline mission (category 1 in the list above). Paul wanted his converts to turn away from idols and worship the God of Israel, thereby being in this respect like Jews. But they did not become Jews, and so they could not claim the Jewish exemption from the standard expectations of civic allegiance. Gentiles could, of course, convert to Judaism, and then accept Jesus as the Messiah, but this would only have put them in trouble with the Jewish community (category 3 in the list above). In Paul’s day, gentile converts ran the risk of being considered disloyal to their city.

12. This was decreed by the emperor Decius in January of 250. By this time, loyalty to the emperor and Rome was very strong, and the decree was widely effective. See Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*, 319–21.

13. “Every aspect of religion and life in the ancient world depended on custom. ‘It was unreasonable to overthrow a way of life handed down to us by our forefathers’ was an argument used time and again against the Christians.” “For anyone to claim openly that the abandonment of custom was ‘a great boon’ was asking for trouble. In c. 311 Eusebius of Caesarea . . . wrote of pagan charges against the Christians of his day: ‘How can men fail in every way to be impious and godless who have apostatized from their ancestral gods? To what kind of punishments would they not be justly subjected, who deserting their ancestral customs have become zealous for foreign myths of the Jews, which are of evil report among all men.’” Ibid., 288f., quoting Clement of Alexandria and Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel*.

From the socio-psychological point of view, Paul's gentile Christians were cut off from both paganism and Judaism. They had neither the pleasures and benefits of pagan society, nor the comfort and satisfaction of Jewish society within the pagan world. They belonged to no established category; religiously, they were nothing; they had only themselves and their belief that, in putting their faith in God and his Son, they were doing the right thing—they were securing their own salvation.

Their condition of religious isolation was hard enough without persecution, but in some cities, as we have seen, they were also persecuted for disloyalty.¹⁴ Above, I suggested that their fault was more like treason than heresy. The problem was not their beliefs but their refusal to support the city by participating in its customs. "Treason," however, is too strong a word. Departing from native customs to follow a weird new religion was, in peaceful times, a fairly light degree of disloyalty, not in the same league as betraying the city to a foreign army. Nevertheless, it drew harassment, as is clear in 1 Thessalonians.

When Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, the days of execution and martyrdom for those who rejected the common culture still lay in the future. We do not know precisely what the persecutions were in Thessalonica, but if they had included execution, we would have the names of the martyrs. The Christian movement cherished its martyrs and remembered them; therefore it is very probable that we know the name of every Christian who was executed prior to the deaths of Peter and Paul: Stephen (Acts 7:58-60), James the brother of John

14. Again I note that disloyalty was to their cities, not to the Roman Empire, which only slowly became somewhat equivalent to a modern nation-state. The older Greek philosophy of citizenship required loyalty to city-states. Beginning in the second century, however, Rome began to require loyalty to the empire and the emperor. "Emperor and gods went together. *Romanitas* was . . . a way of life, guarded by the worship 'handed down to us by our parents.'" Ibid., 181, quoting *The Passion of Saint Procopius*. See also n. 12 above.

(Acts 12:2), and James the brother of Jesus (Josephus, *Antiq.* 20.200). It is extremely unlikely that any of the people in Paul's congregations were executed.

The persecutions that were readily available were these: ostracism, harassment and verbal abuse, rough handling (perhaps up to light beatings), accusation before the magistrates, punishment with rods (on the orders of a magistrate), and short-term imprisonment (e.g., for disturbing the peace or disobeying a magistrate).¹⁵ It will be useful to consider a passage from Acts that is set in Thessalonica:

The Jews became jealous, and with the help of some ruffians in the marketplaces they formed a mob and set the city in an uproar. While they were searching for Paul and Silas to bring them out to the assembly, they attacked Jason's house. When they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some believers before the city authorities. . . . The people and the city officials were disturbed when they heard this, and after they had taken bail from Jason and the others, they let them go. (Acts 17:5-9)

This is an example of "verbal abuse" and "rough handling": the mob physically drags believers before the magistrates and accuses them, though the magistrates do not punish them. This is the sort of thing that, I believe, Paul had in mind when he wrote to the Thessalonians about the persecution that they were suffering.

There is, however, an important way in which Acts does not reveal the situation that is reflected in Paul's letters. In Acts, the conflicts are usually between Paul and "the Jews" (as in the passage above), and in most cases the only gentiles who are involved in any sort of action against the apostles or their converts are stirred up by the Jews and their accusations. I would not wish to deny that this sometimes

15. As we shall see in the chapter on Philippians, punishment in the ancient world did not consist of a system of prison terms of varying lengths, depending on the gravity of the offense. In the case of Paul's two known substantial imprisonments (Caesarea and Rome), he was simply being held in custody until he could be tried.

happened, and I believe that Paul himself was sometimes punished in synagogues. But this does not explain the persecution of Paul's pagan converts after he left.

Paul states that his converts "became imitators of the churches . . . in Judea," since they "suffered the same things" from their compatriots as the Judean Christians suffered from the Jews (1 Thess. 2:14). That is, the gentile converts in Thessalonica were punished by other gentiles there, just as Jewish Christians in Palestine were punished by Jews there. The Jews in Thessalonica, had they wished to attack gentiles for believing in Jesus, would have had a hard time rousing support from other gentiles. Put another way, if Jews in a pagan city started attacking gentiles, they would have been given cause to regret it. In Thessalonica, non-Christian gentiles were persecuting Christian gentiles—presumably on the grounds that I stated, that they had given up the *customs* of their city.

The abuse and harassment described in Acts—which Paul and some of his converts doubtless experienced—is mild in comparison with torture, fighting wild animals in the amphitheater, and being burned alive. On the other hand, it would be terrifying at the time. I, for one, would be quite frightened if a crowd dragged me out of my house, shouted at me, pushed me about, and accused me of disloyalty before a judge—even if he then released me.

Even though it is somewhat unlikely that Jews in the cities Paul visited roused the gentile populace against his gentile converts, they could well have taken offense at *him*, a fellow Jew. Decent, honest Jews could well have regarded him as degrading the good name of Judaism by offering a kind of semi-Judaism, which was at best misleading because it did not include some of the essentials of Judaism, such as circumcision, the Sabbath, and *kosher* food. God, loyal Jews could well have thought, would not look kindly on this sort of half-conversion; it should be all or nothing. Moreover, if

large numbers of people started deserting their native customs and claiming to be following the God of Israel—while not in fact accepting Judaism as a whole—it might lead loyal pagan gentiles of the city to look with hostility at the Jews themselves, as if local Jews were to blame. Thus I can well believe that Jews sometimes gave Paul a hard time, either by flogging him when he showed up at the synagogue (2 Cor. 11:24) or by harassing him when he was trying to convert gentiles (1 Thess. 2:16). This is category 3 above.

It is quite possible that in his mission field Paul was attacked both by pagans who wanted him not to lead people away from their native customs and by fellow Jews for bringing Judaism into disrepute and misleading gentiles with regard to the full obligations of worshipping the God of Israel.

Thus far we have considered suffering only as it is connected to persecution. There are, of course, many other causes of suffering. These are included in some of Paul's later references to suffering (such as 1 Cor. 10:13; 2 Cor. 4:17; Rom. 8:18). The suffering of Christians because of post-baptismal sin (1 Cor. 3:15; 11:27–32) is a special category. All these passages will be considered in their place. In 1 Thessalonians, suffering seems always to be connected with persecution.

To conclude the discussion of persecution, we should emphasize that Paul's theology included the expectation that followers of Christ would be persecuted. This theme, like other features of Paul's theology, will be developed in later letters (see, for example, Rom. 8:17), but it is quite prominent in 1 Thessalonians. Thus Paul wrote that the Thessalonians "became imitators of us and of the Lord, for [they] received the word in much affliction" (1:6, RSV). The NRSV has "*in spite of persecution,*" and the NIV also inserts "*in spite of.*"¹⁶

16. Of the translations I have checked, only the NASV and the RSV correctly leave out "in spite of" and similar phrases.

That is not Paul's point in 1:6, where he rather states a parallel between the Thessalonians on the one hand and Jesus ("the Lord") and himself ("we") on the other. All suffered persecution; therefore such suffering is an essential part of being Christian. By suffering, the Thessalonians became like him and the Lord. It is of course true that the Thessalonians remained faithful *despite* persecution, and that is the theme of 1 Thess. 3:1-10, but it is not the point of 1:6, where Paul comments on the imitation of Christ. His theological view of suffering explains why he had told his converts that "we" (he and they) would suffer even before they were afflicted (3:4). Suffering was an integral part of Christianity.¹⁷

The Return of the Lord: Eschatology

Early Christianity was highly *eschatological*. The etymological meaning of "eschatology" as "teaching or discussion of *last things*," is somewhat misleading. Ancient Jewish eschatologists did not expect the end of the world, but rather divine intervention to change it and make it better. The cosmos would not disintegrate; rather, the old order would end and a new and better one would begin.

Jews on the whole believed that the stories in their sacred Scriptures were true. According to Scripture, God had previously intervened in the world in dramatic ways in order to aid his chosen people. He brought plagues on Egypt, parted the water of the Red Sea, provided manna in the wilderness, made the sun stand still so that the Israelites could achieve a decisive victory, caused the walls of Jericho to fall, and so on. Even such a well-educated Jew as

17. There is a similar issue in Rom. 8:37, where the rsv correctly translates, "No, in all these things [persecutions] we are more than conquerors." In this case, the niv and the nrsv agree with the rsv but the neb inserts "in spite of all." I think that because of the theme of "imitation" it is even clearer that 1 Thess. 1:6 should not have the insertion "in spite of."

Josephus thought that someday again God would cause Israel to gain preeminence, though for the present he had chosen Rome.¹⁸

Some Jews expected God to intervene in the near future in a way that was even more decisive than his actions in bringing Israel out of Egypt and giving them the land of Canaan. There would be a great judgment, the result of which would be the destruction of evil and the establishment of good, and this new and better world would be in many ways unlike the old world. Here one thinks of the prophetic expectations of beating swords into plowshares, giving up war, and even reconciliation between wolves and lambs, leopards and kids, and calves and lions (Isa. 2:4; 11:6-7; 65:25).

Jesus had similar expectations. He began as a follower of John the Baptist, who expected the final great judgment in the immediate future (Matt. 3:1-17). Jesus also thought that the kingdom of God was very near.¹⁹ When he was executed, the disciples naturally wondered if they had been misled: Jesus was dead, and the kingdom had not come. But then he appeared to them, and they became convinced that his view was correct but that they had erred in expecting the kingdom to arise within Jesus' lifetime. They now believed that he himself would soon return to establish the new and better world. Paul and the other early Christians all shared this eschatological vision of the future.

First Thessalonians provides some of the crucial evidence on which the foregoing summary rests. We learn that the Thessalonians were grieving because some had died (4:13). Paul's response was not to say that the dead were now happy souls in heaven, and that their living friends and relatives would see them there when they died. He wrote, instead, that the "dead in Christ will rise first" when the Lord returns

18. Josephus, *War* 5.367; *Antiq.* 10.210. See below, pp. 51-53; 683.

19. See the passages from Matthew cited immediately below; further, Sanders, *Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Allen Lane, 1993), chap. 11.

to earth, that they will then be joined by those “who are alive, who are left,” and that the living and the dead will all rise together to greet the Lord as he descends (4:14–17).

It appears from this passage, which is one of the most remarkable in the entire New Testament, that Paul had not taught the Thessalonians that they would all die but eventually be raised. The Thessalonians expected to be alive when the kingdom arrived, and so they grieved when some died, fearing that the dead would miss out on the glories of the new age that the Lord would establish. We know that Paul believed in resurrection as a concept and probably always had believed in it.²⁰ As an apostle, one of his cardinal beliefs, central to his conversion, was that God had already raised Jesus. Nevertheless, the substance of his message during this part of his career was not that his converts would be raised after they died, but that Jesus had already been raised, and that he would return while Paul’s hearers still lived. Death surprised them.

As we shall see in later chapters, this is one of the aspects of Paul’s gospel that changed somewhat with time; with every passing year, more and more believers died, and so Paul had to emphasize resurrection, though he never gave up the expectation that the Lord’s return was imminent (in Romans, his last surviving letter, see 13:11f.).

Two other aspects of this passage (4:13–17) require comment. One is that Paul calls it a “saying of the Lord,”²¹ indicating that he attributes what follows to Jesus. There are two similar cases. In 1 Cor. 7:10, he prefaces the prohibition of remarriage with this attribution: “To the married I give this command—not I but the Lord . . .” What follows is very similar to the passages on divorce in the Gospels (Matt. 5:31f.//Luke 16:18; Matt. 19:3–12//Mark 10:2–12). In 1 Cor. 11:23 he states that he “received from the Lord” a tradition of Jesus’ Last Supper

20. Above, pp. 49–54.

21. The Greek is literally, “For this we say to you by the word of the Lord.”

that is very much like the story in the Gospels (Matt. 26:26-9//Mark 14:22-5//Luke 22:15-20). In the case of divorce and the Last Supper, therefore, Paul's attributions of the sayings "to the Lord" mean that he is passing on material that he believes to go back to Jesus.

This is also the case with the saying on the return of the Lord. I shall print three passages side-by-side. One is 1 Thess. 4:15-17, and the other two are the closest parallels from the teaching of Jesus as presented in the Gospels. Underlining indicates either verbatim agreement among the passages or very close similarities. We shall discuss some of the words that are only similar to their parallels below.

1 Thess. 4:15-17

Matt. 24:30f.

Matt. 16:27f.

We who are alive, who are left until the appearance of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a command, with the voice of an archangel, and with a trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ will rise first, then we who are alive ... at the very same time

will be snatched up with them in the clouds to greet the Lord in the air.

The sign of the Son of man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of earth will mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming on clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

And he will send his angels with a trumpet of great voice, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one side of heaven to the other.

The Son of man is about to come in the glory of his father with his

angels, and then he will repay to each according to his or her deeds. . . . there are some of those standing here who will not taste death, until they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.

Paul and Matthew have essentially the same component parts. To discover the underlying saying, we should, first of all, ignore Paul's new concern about the dead in Christ, which means taking out the following words from 1 Thess. 4:15: "will not precede those who have fallen asleep." We should also assume that Paul has equated "the

Son of Man” in Matthew with “the Lord.” And, finally, we should note that “some of those standing here will not taste death” in Matt. 16:28 is equivalent to Paul’s “we who are alive.” This gives us the following common elements, which I shall list in the order in which they occur in 1 Thessalonians 4:

<u>1 Thessalonians 4</u>	<u>Matthew 24</u>	<u>Matthew 16</u>
Appearance of the Lord	Sign of the Son of man in heaven	Son of man
come down from heaven	come on clouds	will come
With an archangel	Send his angels	with angels
and a trumpet	with a trumpet	
We who are alive	the elect	Some standing here
will be snatched up	will be gathered	will not taste death

We may safely conclude that Paul’s expectation that the Lord would return while most of his contemporaries were still alive rested solidly on the teaching of Jesus as he had learned it, which means that the other early Christian leaders shared it as well.²² The Thessalonians who accepted his message were grief-stricken when some started dying, and Paul comforted them by promising the resurrection.

Eschatology also probably explains why some may have stopped working (4:11; 5:14). As I suggested above, they perhaps thought that if the Lord would return any day, while more or less everyone was still alive, perhaps the thing to do was to sit, pray, and wait. In his reply to this attitude, Paul reveals his social conservatism and

22. Some may think that, since there are a lot of similarities but a modest amount of verbatim agreement among these traditions, Jesus is not the source. If he were the source, should they not be precisely the same? If, however, one compares the teaching material in Matthew with that in Luke, one will see even greater dissimilarities in parallel passages. It is easy to compare, for example, the Beatitudes in Matt. 5:3-12 with the similar passage in Luke 6:17, 20-23, or the Lord’s Prayer in Matt. 6:9-15 with Luke 11:2-4. Substantial verbal disagreement in parallel passages is actually the rule rather than exception. The followers of Jesus, it turns out, did not commit his sayings to memory perfectly and then check each person’s memory.

his standard concern not to be disreputable: they should live quietly, mind their own affairs, and work with their hands, so that they would “behave properly toward outsiders.” He did not want them to disgrace the cause by begging, nor did he want them ranting on the streets, “Prepare to duck; it’s any day now.”

Most interestingly, although their intense eschatological expectation caused some people to be concerned for the fate of those who died and led others to behave inappropriately, Paul chose not to downplay eschatology at all. There is nothing to the effect that they should calm down; no reminder that the Lord’s ways are mysterious; no statement like that of 2 Peter, “with the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like one day” (2 Pet. 3:8). On the contrary, Paul re-emphasizes the nearness of the end. It will come “like a thief in the night” (5:2); it will hit suddenly, like a woman’s labor pains (5:3). Therefore they must be ready, watchful every moment (5:6-7). In the future, church officials would often try to cool off heated eschatological expectations, but things had not reached that point yet.

Eschatology, as we shall see in later chapters, continued to pose problems in Paul’s churches. He dealt with those problems in diverse ways, often much more creatively than in 1 Thessalonians. Here he calms their fears about the fate of the dead but nevertheless tries to maintain the tension of waiting for an event that might happen at any moment.

Terminology

I must here insert a digression on the terms *eschatology/eschatological* and *apocalypticism/apocalyptic*. As we noted above, “eschatology” means “discussion or thought about (-logy) the end (*eschaton*).” Instead of using this convenient and accurate term, many scholars

use the word *apocalyptic* or *apocalypticism* to refer to end-time events. These terms are based on the Greek word *apokalypsis*, “revelation.” The name of the last book in the New Testament in American English is “Revelation,” short for “The Revelation of St. John.” In Greek, it is *Apokalypsis Ioannou*, “The Apocalypse of John,” and in many countries it is referred to as “The Apocalypse” rather than “Revelation.” An apocalypse, therefore, should be something like the book of Revelation, which consists of visions of heavenly secrets. Corresponding to this, several scholars, led by John Collins, tried a few years ago to establish a distinction between the words *eschatology* and *apocalypticism*. *Eschatology* should refer to “last things” and *apocalypticism* to “heavenly secrets” revealed in some special way, such as by vision or the visit of an otherworldly figure, possibly an angel.²³ Sometimes, of course, the two overlap: a heavenly secret or vision might be about last things, in which case we have “apocalyptic eschatology.”

That is, “eschatology” may or may not be presented in an “apocalyptic” (visionary, etc.) form; “apocalyptic” passages may or may not deal with the impending end. Michael Stone lists three different sorts of material in apocalyptic material: eschatology, speculation (on cosmography, angelology, and the like), and pietistic, moral preaching.²⁴

I was entirely persuaded by this case, and in *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* I used “eschatology” for Paul’s thought about the future and noted that he did not much employ the language of apocalypticism

23. John J. Collins, ed., *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, Semeia 14 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979). Besides John Collins, the contributing authors were Harold Attridge, Adela Collins, Francis Fallon, and Anthony Saldarini. See also Michael Stone, “Apocalyptic Literature,” in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period*, CRINT 2.2, ed. Michael Stone (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1984), esp. 283–84, 392–94; David Hellholm, ed., *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1983).

24. Stone, “Apocalyptic Literature,” 383f.

(that is, seeing or knowing heavenly secrets, calculating times and seasons, describing visions involving beasts, and the like).²⁵ One scholar who used the word *apocalypticism* to mean “eschatology” claimed that I had ignored a major feature of Paul’s thought, which I had in fact emphasized under the correct term.

Despite this misunderstanding, it still seems to me good and right to use *eschatology* as the general term to cover “thought about the end” and *apocalyptic eschatology* to refer to concrete descriptions of the end based on visions or other revelatory events. Observing this practice, I shall call the scene in which the Lord is envisaged as coming on clouds “apocalyptic eschatology.” Paul’s general expectation that the end is near, however, is “eschatology,” not “apocalyptic,” since he usually refers to it without describing a vision-like scene.

Ethics, Especially Sexual Ethics

Paul expected his converts to imitate him in behavior, as they did in suffering. Both of the occurrences of the word *imitator* in 1 Thessalonians (1:6; 2:14) refer to suffering, but it is probable that some of his references to himself, besides being defensive, are also exhortative: they imply that his converts should act the way he does. This is clearest in the case of work: he works (2:9); so should they (4:11; 5:14). There is also a connection between other aspects of his own behavior—which was “pure, upright, and blameless” (2:10)—and theirs: they should be “blameless” “in spirit and soul and body” when the Lord returned (5:23). Paul’s converts could not do better than to be like him—except that they could not be apostles.

In the trilogy “faith, love, and hope” (1:3; similarly 5:8), “love” gives the content of behavior. It probably embraces other

25. E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 543, 554.

exhortations, such as “encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them” (5:14). And love certainly covers: “see that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all” (5:15).

We noted above that a lengthy passage, 4:1-8, deals with sexual ethics. Paul prefaces it by saying that his readers know his previous instructions. The repeated (or expanded) instructions that he now writes are that they abstain from “sexual immorality” (4:3), as the NIV correctly translates *porneia* (from which we derive the word *pornography*). In Paul’s usage, this word refers to any kind of sexual conduct of which he disapproves, and “sexual immorality” is the best term in English to cover all conceivable cases.²⁶ Paul, of course, was against sexual immorality, but what he has to say about it in this passage is partly curious and partly puzzling. We shall consider some of the individual phrases. In 4:4 we meet, for the first but not last time in his letters, a phrase of uncertain meaning. I shall give first a literal translation and then a selection of other translations. I shall italicize the difficult part:

- “that each of you know [how to] *acquire his own vessel*, i.e. his wife, in holiness and honor” (my translation).
- “that each one of you know how to *take a wife for himself* in holiness and honor” (RSV). A footnote offers “or *how to control his own body*.”
- “that each of you should learn to *control his own body* in a way that is holy and honorable” (NIV). A footnote offers “or *learn to live with his own wife; or learn to acquire a wife*.”

26. “Unchastity” (RSV) is satisfactory, but the word is seldom used now; the NRSV’s “fornication,” which usually refers to sexual relations between a man and a woman who are single (and who are not, therefore, committing adultery), is too specific to translate Paul’s *porneia*.

- “that each one of you know how to *control your own body* in holiness and honor” (NRSV). A footnote gives the alternative: “or *how to take a wife for himself*.”

All translators have seen the problems here. The first is that Paul uses a metaphor, “vessel” (*skeuos* in Greek), that is subject to more than one interpretation. In the quotations above I translate *skeuos* as “wife”; the RSV has “wife” as the first option and “his own body” as an alternative; the NIV prefers “his own body” but also offers “his own wife”; the NRSV prefers “your own body” with the alternative “a wife.”

Paul also uses the word *skeuos* in 2 Cor. 4:7, “we have this treasure in earthen vessels,” where “vessel” is a metaphor for the human body, including our own human bodies. This helps to persuade some scholars to understand “vessel” in our passage to mean “one’s own body.”

The interpretation that “vessel” here means “wife” depends on four points: (1) There are other Jewish passages in which “vessel” means “wife.” This is not especially compelling, since “vessel” does not have to have this meaning, but it shows a possibility. (2) More crudely, vessels hold things in their innards, and so do women, who bear children. (3) Paul’s advice, like that of most ancient people, was usually directed to men, unless he indicated that he meant women. Instruction on how to “take a wife” goes quite well in this context. (4) Other Jews who wrote in Greek, specifically Philo and Josephus, claimed that Jews did not marry merely to satisfy lust, but in order to beget children (the passages are cited below). The topic “the motive for marriage” has a home in Diaspora Judaism.

The interpretation of the verb is also extremely important. The word translated above “take,” “control,” “live with,” and “acquire” is *ptaomai*, which usually means “take” or “acquire,” as it does in all the other passages in the New Testament in which it appears.²⁷

Moreover, the Greek translation of *Ben Sira* uses the same verb in the phrase, “the one who acquires a wife” (*Ben Sira* 36:24). It is an uphill battle to have this verb mean “control” or “live with.”

Finally, those who prefer the meaning “control” have a hard time with the following phrases, which are literally “in holiness and honor, not in the passion of desire” (4:4f.). It has never been clear to me what it would mean to *control* one’s own body or one’s own wife “not in the passion of desire.” Thus the best translation of *ktaomai* is “take” or “acquire.”

The evidence points strongly to the interpretation “to acquire one’s own wife.” Now we must ask what it would mean to “acquire one’s own wife in holiness and honor, not in the passion of desire.” Avoiding “the passion of desire” is at home in Greco-Roman ethics as well as in Jewish literature from the Greco-Roman world. I briefly note that Socrates, and apparently Plato as well, was in favor of reducing “to an unavoidable minimum all activity of which the end is physical enjoyment, in order that the irrational and appetitive element of the soul may not be encouraged and strengthened by indulgence.”²⁸ That is: reduce physical pleasure. This ascetic view of some philosophers was at odds with Greek and Roman culture generally, though it gained in force, and parts of it were eventually embraced by Christianity. In Paul’s period, it influenced both Philo and Josephus. Philo regarded the avoidance of *passion* and *desire* (the two words that Paul uses in 4:5) as one of the principal aims of life.²⁹

27. Modern translations obscure the wording of some of these passages, which I here give literally: Matt. 10:9, “do not *take* gold”; Luke 18:12, “I tithe everything I *acquire*”; 21:19, “you will *acquire* your souls”; Acts 1:18, “this man *acquired* a field”; 8:20, “you thought that you could *get* God’s gift with money”; 22:28, “to *acquire* citizenship.”

28. K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 167.

29. Paul wrote “not in the passion of desire,” *mē en pathēi epithymias*. Philo wrote that “every passion” (*pathos*) is blameworthy” (*Spec. Laws* 4.79). He continued: Moses discarded passion “as most vile in itself and in its effects”, and he denounced desire (*epithymia*) “as a battery of destruction to the soul” (4.95). Philo is here attributing to Moses the ascetic side of Greek philosophy.

He applied the avoidance of passion to numerous topics, including marriage. According to Philo, Jewish males as well as females married as virgins and, even within marriage, desire was to be reduced to a minimum: “The end we seek in wedlock is not pleasure [*hēdonē*], but the begetting of lawful children” (*On Joseph* 43). We find the same view in one of Josephus’s summaries of the Jewish law: “The Law recognizes no sexual connexions, except the natural union of man and wife, and that only for the procreation of children” (*Apion* 2.199). Sex should provide as little pleasure as possible.

To prevent misunderstanding, I must add that this pleasure-denying view is not typical of the Hebrew Bible; and, as far as I know, it did not penetrate Hebrew- and Aramaic-speaking Judaism. It comes from one stream of Greek philosophy, and it influenced some important sectors of Greek-speaking Judaism in the Diaspora. From there it passed into Christianity, with Paul as the first conduit (as far as we know). In later years it became a principal aspect of Christian morality, and sexual celibacy (total abstention) even became an ideal. Avoidance of pleasure, especially sexual pleasure, was not, however, a major theme in Paul’s letters. The present passage is the only time in the surviving literature that he says anything negative about sexual desire (*epithymia*).

To repeat, Paul’s passage about not acquiring a wife (solely) out of passion and desire is from Diaspora Judaism and is at variance with the views that we know from Palestinian Jewish sources.

At any rate, I propose this as the approximate meaning of the words we are considering. For the sake of clarity, I shall repeat the passage, adding words in square brackets that are not in the text: “that each of you [men] know how to acquire a wife in holiness and honor [that is, for the worthy purpose of procreation], not with the passion of desire [that is, merely to satisfy lust].” We shall return to Paul’s view of marriage in 1 Corinthians 7.

Of course Paul also thought that all people should avoid every form of sexual *immorality*—of which adultery is the chief example—and that they should “control their own bodies” to keep from committing transgressions. This interpretation of 1 Thess. 4:4–5 is not untrue to Paul, but I think that he had a somewhat different and more specific intention in writing the present passage: a man should not acquire a wife only to satisfy sexual desire.

Today we may wish that Paul had couched more of his instruction in terms equally suitable for men and women, but he followed the conventions of the day and addressed ethical instruction to males. Those who wish to follow his admonitions may easily adapt them to different circumstances. (See also below, pp. 289–90, on 1 Cor. 7:2.)

A second phrase in 1 Thess. 4:3–7 requires comment. It immediately follows the words we have just discussed: “not with the passion of desire *like the Gentiles who do not know God*” (4:5). We shall see throughout that as an apostle of Christ, Paul re-thought a lot of things, but he did not rethink questions of behavior very often. This entire passage on *porneia* would be perfectly at home in a synagogue sermon in the Diaspora, and Philo and Josephus would have regarded it with pleasure. Paul’s ethical positions are those of a fairly rigorous Diaspora Jew, and here we even see the homiletical language of a synagogue sermon. “You, here in this synagogue, should not act like the gentiles all around you, who marry for lust.” Paul temporarily writes to his gentile converts as if they are Jews and tells them not to act like gentiles!

There were, as we shall see again and again, two aspects of Judaism that Paul never questioned: monotheism and sexual ethics. In this case, he thought that (since it was un-Jewish) it was unchristian for a man to take a wife merely to satisfy his “passion of desire.” That’s what pagans did.

The Attack on the Jews

One of Paul's comments on the suffering of his Thessalonian converts is that they "became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea," since both were persecuted by their compatriots (2:14). He then adds two verses on the Jews that are puzzling and surprising, especially in light of his discussion of the people of Israel in a later letter (Rom. 9–11), where he shows himself to be passionately concerned about the fate of his own people. Here the tone is quite different:

[The Jews] killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out; they displease God and oppose everyone by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. Thus they have constantly been filling up the measure of their sins; but God's wrath has overtaken them at last. (2:15–16)

"Killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets" is not historically accurate. We noted above that the Romans executed Jesus (though after he was tried by Caiaphas, the high priest), and there is also no good evidence that "the Jews" murdered any of their own prophets, though accusations of the killing of prophets and some martyrological stories about the deaths of prophets do appear in Jewish literature.³⁰ Despite the existence of a precedent (Neh. 9:26), this is a nasty comment, presumably the result of deep anger, rather than a charge whose accuracy could be defended in court. It is a little uncertain to what the statement that the Jews "drove us out" refers. "We" are presumably the Christians in Jerusalem, who were persecuted; some of them may have left Jerusalem (cf. Acts 8:1).³¹

30. In the Hebrew Bible, Nehemiah states that the Israelites had killed their prophets (Neh. 9:26). A martyrological story appears in the *Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah*, which can be found in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, trans. and ed. M. A. Knibb (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983–85), 2:143–76. See also Acts 7:52; Matt. 23:30–31.

31. According to Acts 8:1, all the Christians temporarily left Jerusalem except the apostles, who

The next phrase, they “hinder us from speaking to the gentiles,” probably reflects the source of Paul’s anger. He was opposed by some of his compatriots, and he was sometimes flogged.³² That is, Jews opposed his message to gentiles, probably because he was offering the biblical promises to people who were not Jewish (above, pp. 194–95; below, p. 248).

But what does it mean that “God’s wrath has overtaken them at last”? “At last,” literally “to the end,” may be translated “completely,” “forever” (footnotes to RSV and NRSV), or “fully” (footnote to NIV). Scholars have searched history and racked their brains in the attempt to find some calamity that had fallen upon the Jews that would explain this remark, without producing a thoroughly satisfying explanation.

The difficulty of finding a good explanation for 2:15, together with the vicious tone, has led some scholars to propose that these verses are not authentic parts of the letter, but were added later, perhaps after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE. That was an event that was disastrous enough to merit “God’s wrath has overtaken them.”

I always dislike deleting material from an ancient text that I personally find offensive (fearing that I would be reflecting only my own preference), and I am not going to follow that path. I accept these harsh lines about his own people as being what Paul really wrote. Probably the best explanation is that he was suffering persecution at the time (3:7), sometimes from Jews, that he was angry, and that he wrote in an exaggerated way.³³

Although nothing had happened that we would now describe as God’s wrath coming upon people completely, Paul might have

were the only ones being persecuted! Perhaps some members of the Christian community really did flee Jerusalem.

32. See 2 Cor. 11:24; above, pp. 205–6.

33. See Carol Schlueter, *Filling Up the Measure: Polemical Hyperbole in 1 Thessalonians 2:14–16*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 98 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1994).

had in mind some recent bad news from Palestine or about some group of Jews that seemed like at least the beginning of God's wrath. He was an eschatologist, and eschatologists sometimes find "signs" of the approaching climax in events that appear trivial to others. Though he knew that the "day of the Lord" would come without warning (5:1-11), he may nevertheless have yielded to the temptation to interpret some event as a sign.

I shall mention just one possibility that might explain "God's wrath has overtaken them at last," as being based on a recent or current event—partly because we shall return to the point in a later chapter. In or shortly after the year 41 CE, the emperor Claudius expelled some Jews from Rome.³⁴ The chronology is slightly difficult, but conceivably this event happened before Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians, in which case he might have considered it the beginning of God's wrath against the Jews of Judea.

Thus, although it is possible that the hand that wrote "wrath has come upon them at last" penned these words for the first time after Paul's death and after the destruction of Jerusalem, we should try to explain them as Paul's own words, which is the purpose of my suggestion.

It will offend some for me to suggest that Paul wrote this attack on the Jews in a fit of pique, because he felt personally frustrated and irritated that some were interfering during his conduct of the mission that God gave him. Surely a saint-to-be would not lash out in anger! But, alas! People who are destined for sainthood are human, and all humans have failings. I try never to judge anyone by his worst performance but by his best. I apply this rule to all my heroes, though they all have flaws.

34. See the discussion of this event below, p. 694.

The Macedonians in Later Letters

The ties of affection and loyalty between Paul and his converts in Macedonia (Philippi and Thessalonica) are clearer in later correspondence than they are in 1 Thessalonians. We shall see this evidence when we reach 2 Corinthians and Philippians. Here I wish briefly to cite it.

1. During Paul's founding visit to Corinth, he did not take money for support from the Corinthians; rather, "brothers who came from Macedonia" supplied his needs (2 Cor. 11:7-9).
2. According to 2 Cor. 8:1-7, in their affliction and extreme poverty the Macedonians had nevertheless wholeheartedly contributed to the collection that Paul was taking up to help the poor among the Jerusalem Christians. Paul uses their example to encourage the Corinthians to do the same—or possibly to shame them into it. In 2 Cor. 9:2 he writes that he had boasted about the Corinthians' contributions to the Macedonians. He may bring some people from Macedonia to accompany the collection to Jerusalem, and he hopes that they will not find that the Corinthians have let down the side when they reach Corinth (9:4).
3. The letter to the Philippians, one of Paul's last surviving letters, is full of Paul's gratitude to them for helping him in material ways, not only at the time of the letter, when he was in prison, but also earlier, when he was in Thessalonica and when he left Macedonia to go to Athens and Corinth (Phil. 4:15-16).

The Galatians may have revolted against Paul; the Corinthians certainly did, though he won them back; but apparently through it all, thick and thin, the Macedonians were with him.

The Question of Development

Here we shall merely note the state of several issues in 1 Thessalonians that will later become more complicated or richer:

1. In 1 Thessalonians eschatology is very simple: people are to wait, in a state of blamelessness, until the Lord returns. The few who die will presumably remain in their graves until that day. There is no hint that when they die their souls go immediately to heaven, while only their bodies wait. The person is not divided into inner and outer. The whole person, whether living or dead, awaits the coming of the Lord.
2. The Spirit dwells with and acts through the believers. Prophecy is the only specific activity that is mentioned in connection with the Spirit.
3. Suffering is *imitation* of Christ (and of Paul), not yet the *sharing of or participation in* Christ's suffering. Christians are like him in their suffering, but suffering is not interpreted as showing that they are *in* him—as it later would be.
4. "Righteousness by faith" has not yet appeared. Acting "righteously" means living correctly. "Faith" is primarily remaining steadfast while suffering persecution (pp. 193–207 above).
5. There may be a hint—if that—of "being one person with Christ" in 5:9–10: "Christ 'died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him.'" This certainly implies that Christ is alive and is present within the congregation, which lives "with him," that is, in his presence. It would be a stretch to find here the later idea of being one person with Christ.

The Corinthian Correspondence, Part 1: Introduction and Sequence of Events and Letters

Introduction

Corinth was the capital of Achaia, which was the Roman province that included most of Greece.¹ Its location made it an extremely important city. It was situated near the northeast corner of the Peloponnese, where it controlled not only the thin strip of land, called the isthmus, which connected the Peloponnese and the Greek mainland, but also two ports, Lechaëum on the Gulf of Corinth (northwest of the isthmus) and Cenchreae on the Gulf of Saron (southeast of the isthmus). Attempts to dig a canal across the isthmus did not succeed, but a paved road was built, which allowed light ships to be hauled from one gulf to the other, thus avoiding the

1. See "Achaia," *OCD*3, 6; Richard Talbert, *Atlas of Classical History* (New York: Macmillan, 1985), 129 D4.

dangerous passage around Cape Maleae, at the southeastern tip of the Peloponnese.

With relatively easy access to two ports, Corinth had a long, complicated, and, on the whole, prosperous history. As early as Homer, it was known as “wealthy Corinth” (*Iliad* 2.570). Early in the Roman period, after Rome defeated Macedonia (198–196 BCE),² Corinth became the chief city of the Achaean Confederacy. Rome subsequently decided that the Confederacy was too powerful, and Roman forces largely destroyed the city in 146 BCE. Julius Caesar re-founded Corinth as a Roman colony in 44 BCE. Settlers came from various nations: Greece, probably also Rome, Syria, Judea, and Egypt. Corinth again rose to a prominent position. The city was also the home of the biannual Isthmian games, one of the principal Greek athletic festivals.³

In some fourth century BCE Athenian literature, Corinth is depicted as a hotbed of sexual vice. Since it stood so near to two ports, it probably did afford more opportunities than were available in classical Athens, which was relatively prim and proper. There is, however, no reason to regard first-century Corinth as more addicted to vice than other cities of similar size and circumstances.⁴

According to Acts, after Paul left Thessalonica he went to Athens (Acts 17) and then to Corinth (18:1). There he met Aquila and Priscilla, who were also tentmakers, and stayed with them (18:2–3).

2. *OCD*2, 290.

3. The previous section depends heavily on the work of Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, which I strongly recommend: “The Corinth that Saint Paul Saw,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 47 (1984): 147–59; “Corinth,” *ABD* 1:1134–139; *Saint Paul’s Corinth: Texts and Archaeology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1983).

4. Murphy-O'Connor, *ABD* 1:1135–136, 1138; cf. Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 12 and notes. On the fame of Corinthian prostitutes and *hetairai* during the classical period, see K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 135.

He remained in Corinth for a year and six months (18:11), during which he established a Christian congregation.

While he was in Corinth, “the Jews” brought him before Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia, and accused him of “persuading people to worship God in ways that are contrary to the law.” Gallio declined to take action (18:12–17). This gives us the only firm date in Paul’s chronology: Gallio was proconsul for one year, 51 CE.

From Corinth, Paul returned to the East, traveling to Syria and, according to one interpretation of Acts 18:22, to Jerusalem.⁵ When Paul returned to the west, his first substantial stay was in Ephesus, in the province of Asia, in western Asia Minor (19:1–41). From there, he sent Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia (19:22), and later followed them (20:1), traveling next to Greece (20:2), presumably including Corinth.

The evidence from Paul’s letters supports much of this itinerary. The sequence of Acts 17:1–18:17 (Thessalonica → Athens → Corinth) is supported partly by 1 Thess. 3:1 (Paul wrote to Thessalonica from Athens) and partly by its reasonableness.

The second sequence of Paul’s travels as presented in Acts 18:18–20:2 will turn out to be less accurate, as we shall see. Paul’s letters show that his travels and actions were more complicated than the itinerary in Acts, and that it is also partially incorrect.

The Corinthian correspondence, which refers to various trips and events, is very complicated. It may facilitate the following discussion if first I give a list of the letters in chronological order:

1. Alpha Corinthians (a letter to which Paul refers that is now lost, though 2 Cor. 6:14–7:2 may preserve a fragment of it).
2. 1 Corinthians.

5. According to Acts 18:22, from Caesarea he “went up” and then “went down to Antioch.” Since going to Jerusalem was often called “going up to Jerusalem,” “went up” in this verse is often taken to mean that he went to Jerusalem. This visit, however, is excluded by Gal. 1:18–2:1.

3. 2 Corinthians 10–13, termed “the painful letter.”
4. 2 Corinthians 1–9, “the letter of relief,” which refers back to 2 Corinthians 10–13.

When the letters were published, the editor of Paul’s letters did not put them in chronological order. The editorial work is discussed below (pp. 229–31). Now I shall show why it is necessary to rearrange what we now have as 2 Corinthians.

Sequence of Events and Letters

When we read 2 Corinthians, we encounter passages that raise questions about the Corinthians’ relationship with Paul. In 2 Cor. 1:15–2:4, we find an explanation of why Paul had cancelled a trip to Corinth, a cancellation that apparently drew criticism. He states that he first intended to visit Corinth twice, both on his way from Ephesus to Macedonia and then on his way back. Then he adds, “Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this? Do I make my plans according to ordinary human standards, ready to say ‘yes, yes’ and ‘no, no’ at the same time?” (2 Cor. 1:15–18). The rhetorical questions are defensive, replying to criticism because he did not make one of his planned visits.

He then gives his reason for cancelling the second visit: “I call on God as witness against me: it was to spare you that I did not come again to Corinth” (1:23). He continues, “I made up my mind not to make you another painful visit” (2:1). “I wrote as I did so that when I came I might not have to suffer pain from those who should have made me rejoice . . . I wrote you out of much distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain, but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you” (2:3–4).

Thus we learn that Paul made a trip to Corinth, that it was a painful visit, and that after he left he sent the Corinthians a harsh letter that

pained them. We infer from this that the crisis is over. Later in 2 Corinthians this is confirmed: “Even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest. . . . but God, who consoles the downcast, consoled us by the arrival of Titus, and not only by his coming . . . as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me” (2:5-7). In the next verses Paul continues to rejoice over the reconciliation. The crisis, which created so much anguish and raised so many fears, was brought to a conclusion by the invaluable Titus, following Paul’s harsh letter.

Second Corinthians 8 and 9 are about Paul’s collection for the “saints” in Jerusalem, which indicates that the Corinthians are firmly in the fold.

But then we hit 2 Corinthians 10: “I, Paul, appeal to you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away . . .” This is the tone of hostility, and the rest of chapters 10–13 are more hostile and defensive yet. “We are ready to punish every disobedience . . .” (10:6); “If someone comes and proclaims another Jesus . . . you submit to it readily enough . . .” (11:4); “I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles. I may be untrained in speech, but not in knowledge . . .” (11:5).

Thus, in moving through 2 Corinthians we find difficulty and sharp criticism (1:15–2:4), relief and joy (2:5-17), friendly admonishments on the offering (chs. 8-9), and then more difficulty and hostility (2 Cor. 10-13).

The reader is at first inclined to think that something happened between chapter 9 (when all was well) and chapter 10 (when Paul appears to be losing his church to other apostles). This, of course, has led to speculation and invention about the issue that arose between chapters 9 and 10.

There is, however, another possibility. We recall from chapter 6

that Paul's letters, written in the 40s and 50s, were collected sometime between the mid-80s and mid-90s. In the decades between composition and collection, some of the letters must have suffered damage. Some entire letters may have been lost, others partially destroyed. In any case, the original editor did not know the sequence in which the letters were written—and if he had known it he might not have cared, as he arranged the letters by length.

Following such considerations, many scholars, centuries ago, began rearranging the parts of 2 Corinthians. The simplest and, to my mind, by far the most likely rearrangement is the simple switch between 2 Corinthians 1–9 and 10–13, placing 10–13 (a very angry letter) before 1–9 (a letter of relief and rejoicing).⁶ There are lots of rearrangements, and various bits of 2 Corinthians have been put in different places, but in order to explain the Corinthian correspondence, it is sufficient to accept the simple rearrangement of putting 2 Corinthians 10–13 before 1–9,⁷ and we shall consider the texts in that order.⁸

I accept one other minor bit of fiddling with the text: In 1 Corinthians Paul writes, “I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral person—not . . . meaning the immoral of this world . . . since you would then need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name

6. The view that 2 Corinthians 10–13 was written before 2 Corinthians 1–9 goes back to the eighteenth century and has been accepted by the majority of the best-known scholars. For the history, see Hans Dieter Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 3–36. Most views are more complicated than the simple one I present here, since other portions of the Corinthian correspondence may now appear out of place. But the main point is usually to put 2 Corinthians 10–13 chronologically before 2 Corinthians 1–7.

7. Although this will not affect our study of Corinthians, I should note that it is probable that Galatians precedes 2 Corinthians 1–9. (See p. 448 n. 11.) If so, this partially explains why he was so agitated when he wrote Galatians.

8. On the whole, older commentators paid more detailed attention to problems such as this than do more recent commentators, who often only state what position they take. For a good discussion, see Alfred Plummer, *Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, International Critical Commentary (New York: Scribner, 1915), xiii–xix.

of brother or sister who is sexually immoral . . .” (1 Cor. 5:9–11). Here Paul explicitly mentions a letter that preceded 1 Corinthians and that we do not have. I refer to this lost letter as α (alpha) Corinthians.

It is possible, and I think likely, that we have a fragment of it in 2 Cor. 6:14–7:1. These verses deal with a similar theme (sexual immorality), and they are also out of place between 2 Cor. 6:13 and 7:2. One will easily see how smoothly 2 Cor. 7:2 follows 6:13.

I have now briefly explained why we should put 2 Corinthians 10–13 before 2 Corinthians 1–9 and also the probability that we have a fragment of *alpha* Corinthians. Because the rearrangement of 2 Corinthians is crucial to understanding Paul’s relationship with the Corinthians, as well as the difficulties that he faced, I shall discuss the issue at greater length and with full details. This will also illuminate trends in biblical scholarship and some of the causes that lie behind them.

Earlier, I noted that in recent years there has been a trend toward rejecting the long-held view that 2 Corinthians 10–13 and 1–9 should be reversed (pp. 134–35). Various scholars have proposed that these verses should be read in the order in which they appear in the Bible. Because of this, I wish to look at the arguments of a leading conservative scholar of the previous generation, C. K. Barrett.

C. K. Barrett’s Argument

1. After writing 1 Corinthians and making his second visit to Corinth, Paul wrote a painful letter and sent it by Titus. That letter, however, has been entirely lost (not partially preserved in 2 Cor. 10–13, as the former consensus held).⁹
2. Titus returned with good news, and Paul wrote 2 Corinthians 1–9, the “letter of relief.”

9. C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 8.

3. Later, however, Paul learned that Titus had erred: he “had misjudged and misrepresented the situation in Corinth—unless indeed it had radically altered as soon as he left the city.”¹⁰
4. In response to learning that Titus had not repaired the situation, Paul now wrote “a letter, contained (wholly or in part)” in 2 Corinthians 10–13.¹¹
5. In that letter, Paul promised a third visit to Corinth, which he made.¹²
6. Since Paul wrote to Rome that Achaia contributed to the collection (Rom. 15:26), his third visit must have been successful.¹³

This analysis requires Paul to have written *two* painful letters, one lost, one now in 2 Corinthians 10–13. Barrett also must invent Titus’s misjudgment *or* a rapid change in Corinth after Titus delivered the first painful letter and reported back to Paul that all was well. Moreover, this view must add an otherwise unknown trip by someone to Corinth and back to Paul to report that the first painful letter and Titus’s visit had in fact been failures.

This is quite a lot of invention, and I think that it fails the test of Occam’s razor; it is simpler just to rearrange the material a little. Positing an entirely lost letter and an otherwise unknown trip, plus either Titus’s misjudgment or the Corinthians’ rapid reversal, adds unnecessary hypotheses.

Why go to these lengths? The only motive that I can think of for a reconstruction such as Barrett’s is a supposedly “conservative” desire to be able to make sense of the Corinthian correspondence while reading it in the biblical sequence. But this requires so much

10. Ibid., 9.

11. Ibid., 10.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

invention that it is hard to see what is “conservative” about it. If I wished to be conservative, I would try to make sense of what we have rather than create letters and events that we do not have.

Moreover, I do not understand the view that the Corinthian correspondence, as it now stands in the New Testament, must be in the *original chronological order simply because that is “biblical.”* Arrangement in the chronological order of composition does not prevail in the Bible. Few people think that Leviticus was actually written before Deuteronomy, and fewer think that Matthew was written before Mark. Turning to the Pauline corpus, I doubt that anyone believes that Romans was written before 1 Corinthians. Romans comes first in the Bible because it is longer. In the case of 2 Corinthians, I have no doubt that the editor made what he thought was the *best* arrangement of the material that he collected in Corinth. But we have no reason to think that he regarded chronological sequence as “best.” Possibly chapters 1–9 now precede 10–13 because 1–9 is longer.

Alternatively, one might suggest that the editor put the painful letter last precisely because it was painful and unpleasant in parts. Things that are put last are thereby designated “least important.” Similarly, Martin Luther, who disliked the “letter” of James because it criticized Paul, moved it to the end of the Bible in his translation.

It is doubtless true that sometimes when scholars start rearranging material they go too far. There have been lots of attempts to “straighten out” Paul’s thinking by rearranging things to make them more systematic. I do not favor a majority of the proposed rearrangements of Paul’s letters, but given the above considerations, we really do need to read 2 Corinthians 10–13 before 2 Corinthians 1–9.

What is perhaps most important about the question of the arrangement of the Corinthian correspondence is to ensure that every

serious student knows that the contrast between 2 Corinthians 1–9, which expresses joy and relief that a serious rupture has been healed, and 2 Corinthians 10–13, which narrates vicious attacks on Paul, followed by his verbal retaliation, *must be explained*. Either one rearranges the material to put the attacks before the reconciliation, or one invents letters, trips, and developments between 1 and 2 Corinthians and then between 2 Corinthians 9 and 10. Rearranging seems to me to be more conservative, in the sense described above—in case that is a goal to be pursued.

Back to the Sequence of Trips and Letters

For the readers' convenience, I shall repeat the list of the parts of the Corinthian correspondence in their correct chronological order. Bearing this in mind will make the following details clearer.

1. Alpha Corinthians (of which a fragment is found in 2 Cor. 6:14–7:2).
2. 1 Corinthians.
3. 2 Corinthians 10–13, the painful letter.
4. 2 Corinthians 1–9, the letter of relief and reconciliation.

The events that are reflected in the Corinthian letters took place while Paul was either in Ephesus, on the road between Ephesus and Corinth, in Corinth, on the road to Macedonia, or in Macedonia. I shall now offer a list of both trips and letters with details and passages. This was a tumultuous period in Paul's apostleship, and the letters enable us to follow trips and incidents. We do not know how typical this level of activity was. Paul probably always lived in the middle of a whirlwind, at least a small one.

In any case, the letters reveal the instability of Paul's gentile churches, his own hectic activity, his anxiety, anguish, and anger

when things went wrong, and his ability to rise above the fray, to put things in a bigger perspective, and to be grateful for victories.

I shall underline information about the trips and italicize the letters and other means of communication. The rest of the text in this list gives the evidence. For greatest comprehension one should read the passages in Paul's letters that are cited in each paragraph. We start where 1 Thessalonians ends; Paul wrote that letter from Athens.

1. From Athens he went to Corinth. On this, his first visit to the city, he founded a Christian congregation. He refers back to the establishment of the church in 1 Cor. 1:14–16 and 2:1: he baptized no one except Crispus and Gaius and perhaps a few others;¹⁴ he did not preach in lofty words or wisdom.
2. From Corinth he returned to Syria, then again went west, to Ephesus (Acts 18:18–19:1; for the Ephesus stay, see 1 Cor. 15:32; 16:8).
3. While he was in Ephesus, *Paul received information from the Corinthians*, which he answered in a *lost (or mostly lost) letter (alpha Corinthians)*, a fragment of which is preserved in 2 Cor. 6:14–7:2. Possibly Timothy *carried this letter (alpha Corinthians)*.¹⁵
4. *News from Corinth reached Paul in Ephesus*: (a) Chloe's people brought him a report (1 Cor. 1:11); (b) *he received a letter from Corinth* (1 Cor. 7:1); (c) three Corinthians came to see him (Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus) (1 Cor. 16:17). The letter could have been brought either by Chloe's people or by the

14. Apparently Paul did not baptize "many" in Corinth, as Acts 18:8 implies. In 1 Cor. 1:17 he explains that Christ did not send him to baptize, "but to proclaim the gospel."

15. In 1 Cor. 4:17 Paul writes that he "sent" Timothy, which may mean that he sent him with α Corinthians. The tense of the Greek verb is aorist, and "sent" could be either the simple past tense or the "epistolary aorist," in which case it should be construed as a present tense. If the verb translated "sent" is an ordinary aorist, Timothy carried α Corinthians; if it is "epistolary," he carried 1 Corinthians.

three men. On the basis of what we read in 1 Corinthians, we could think that all of these sources of information immediately preceded 1 Corinthians, but it is quite possible that one or more of these sources may have preceded *alpha Corinthians*.

5. *Paul then wrote 1 Corinthians*, in which he responds to the news that he had received. In this letter he announced travel plans. He would go from Ephesus to Macedonia (Philippi and Thessalonica) and then to Achaia (Corinth): 1 Cor. 16:5-8. In an angry burst in 1 Cor. 4:18-21, he threatens to come and demonstrate his power. We should note also his plan to come and instruct them about their gatherings (1 Cor. 11:34).
6. This plan was not executed.
7. The next thing that happened after 1 Corinthians is that Paul went to Corinth (before Macedonia). This, his second visit to the city, was painful.
8. After the painful visit, Paul *wrote the angry letter* now in 2 Corinthians 10-13. (Possibly this is only part of the angry letter.) He refers *back* to it in 2 Cor. 7:8. That is, the editor has inserted the painful letter (2 Cor. 10-13) *after* the letter that reveals that Paul and the Corinthians had been reconciled (2 Cor. 1-7).
9. Paul sent Titus and "the brother" (2 Cor. 12:18), who probably carried the painful letter. In 2 Cor. 12:14-18 and 13:1-4 he threatens a *third visit*. This is a *visit that he did not make*, for which he apologizes in 2 Cor. 1:15-2:12, claiming he wanted not to make another painful visit. (The editor, to repeat, placed the threat in 2 Corinthians 12 and 13 after the apology in 2 Cor. 1:15-2:12, which is connected with the reconciliation. We must reverse the sequence, putting 2 Corinthians 12 and 13 before 2 Cor. 1:15-2:12).

10. Therefore after the painful visit and the *harsh letter* he went to Troas and then on to Macedonia (2 Cor. 1:15—2:12).
11. Titus met him there with good news (2 Cor. 7:5-7).
12. Paul *wrote* 2 Corinthians 1-9 (or possibly only chaps. 1-7).¹⁶
13. After these events and letters, Paul probably went back to Corinth (his third visit), collected the money (discussed in 2 Corinthians 8-9), and took ship from there to Jerusalem. He delivered the money and was arrested.

I append here a set of cross-references between 2 Corinthians 10-13 and 2 Corinthians 1-9, putting the earlier one on the left side and the later one on the right. I am copying this from a work by Kirsopp Lake, who offers an elegant explanation of the proposal that I outlined above.¹⁷ I quote Lake's translations:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. "For this cause I write these things from a distance, that I may not when I come deal sharply" (2 Cor. 13:10) | 1. "And I wrote this same thing that when I came I might not have sorrow" (2 Cor. 2:3) |
| 2. "If I come again I will not spare" (2 Cor. 13:2) | 2. "To spare you I came not again to Corinth" (2 Cor. 1:23) |
| 3. "Being in readiness to avenge all disobedience when your obedience shall be fulfilled" (2 Cor. 10:6) | 3. "For to this end also did I write that I might know the proof of you, whether ye are obedient in all things" (2 Cor. 2:9) |

In each of these cases, it is seen that the passage in the right-hand column refers *back* to a statement in the left-hand column. The passages in the right-hand column, however, all appear in our present Bibles earlier than the passages in the left-hand column.

I wish to repeat that the fourteen-item list will make much better sense if one reads the passages in the sequence suggested above. It

16. For 2 Corinthians 8-9, see chap. 15.

17. Kirsopp Lake, *The Earlier Epistles of St. Paul: Their Motive and Origin* (London: Rivington, 1911), 157-62, here 159-60.

would also help to consult a map. Before leaving the list, however, we should note its disagreements with Acts. As we saw above, Acts mentions some trips in 19:22—20:2, but not the complicated series that the letters reveal. The real events were a good deal more hectic than one would gather from Acts, and Titus played an important role that is not indicated in Acts—which never mentions him at all, despite his major role in two of Paul’s crises, the one in Corinth and the one in Galatia.¹⁸ Moreover, in Acts there is no hint that Paul was on the verge of losing his church—a possibility that is quite clear in the painful visit and the painful letter.

Topics and Events

Because the topics in the Corinthian correspondence are so rich in information about Paul and his fledgling congregations, and thus about life “on the ground” as the new religion began to take root and grow, and so many of the themes are interrelated with the crisis that he faced, it is a little hard to know the best way to present the information. I have chosen first of all to go through the parts of the letters that reveal the nature of the crisis in chronological order (1 Corinthians; 2 Cor. 10–13; 2 Cor. 1–9) and to discuss the issues of theology and behavior as they arise in those sections of the correspondence. I shall then return to the other issues of theology and ethics that arise elsewhere in the letters. If an issue appears in more than one place in the letters, I shall discuss the passages in chronological order.

Many or most of the problems of theology and behavior that are not connected with the crisis were raised as questions by the Corinthians themselves, or put to Paul by Chloe’s people or the three men who visited him in Ephesus (above, item 4 in the chronological

18. Titus or Titius Justus (Acts 18:7), who lived in Corinth, is not the Titus who traveled with Paul.

list). In 1 Corinthians, it is clear that Paul is replying to reports that he has received or to questions raised by the Corinthians' letter to him: "it is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you" (1 Cor. 5:1); "When any of you has a grievance against another, do you dare to take it to court before the unrighteous?" (6:1); "Now concerning the matters about which you wrote . . ." (7:1).

Paul dealt with most of these questions and reports in 1 Corinthians, but some spill over into parts of 2 Corinthians. An example is the resurrection (1 Cor. 15; 2 Cor. 4–5). In this case, and in similar cases, I shall deal with all of the overlapping material in the same section of this book. This will sometimes involve pulling information from other letters into the discussion required to explain the Corinthian correspondence. Tracing the resurrection, for example, from 1 Thessalonians to 1 Corinthians to 2 Corinthians to Philippians will enable us to see how Paul's thought matured and how it was affected by different circumstances (see chaps. 14–15 below).

We begin with the crisis, indicating opposition and challenges from 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians 10–13, and then 2 Corinthians 1–9.

The Corinthian Crisis: Competition and Opponents

The Corinthian letters reveal three general types of problems: other Christian leaders were asserting themselves in Corinth; there were important theological problems (e.g., the resurrection); there were important problems of behavior (such as speaking in tongues, eating meat offered to idols, and incest). In this section, we shall deal with the first of these: other Christian leaders.

In 1 Corinthians, after the usual opening elements (Paul and Sosthenes to the church in Corinth; grace and peace; thanksgiving: 1 Cor. 1:1–9), Paul turns to "divisions" or "factions" (*schismata*, 1:10): "each of you says, 'I belong to Paul,' or 'I belong to Apollos,' or 'I

belong to Cephas' [Peter],¹⁹ or 'I belong to Christ'" (1:12). We never learn precisely what this means. Paul wanted his converts to belong to Christ and secondarily to himself. They seem instead to have been choosing leaders and putting the apostles (or missionaries) on the same plane as Christ.²⁰ After listing factions and leaders, Paul turns immediately to two topics that seem to be related to them: baptism and eloquent wisdom. Then he directly addresses the issues posed by other leaders, especially Apollos.

About baptism, Paul says only that he is glad that he baptized only a few people, so that the Corinthians could not claim to have been baptized in his name (1:14-17). This may suggest that at least one other Christian apostle had been in Corinth and had baptized some of the Corinthians.

Eloquent speech, which Paul relates to "wisdom" (e.g., 2:1), occupies the rest of chapter 1 and all of chapter 2. We do not learn what the content of the wisdom was, and it is useless to offer hypotheses. Frustration has, of course, led commentators to speculate endlessly about "wisdom" and to suggest complicated combinations of various "wisdoms" that were on offer in the ancient world. What we know for sure is that someone there was speaking in "lofty words" (2:1) and with "eloquent wisdom" (1:17), which, the Corinthians seem to have thought, Paul lacked.

He defends himself by stating that he does speak wisdom among the mature, "though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory" (2:6-7). Paul's secret wisdom consisted of proclaiming "Christ

19. On the identification of "Cephas" with "Peter," see pp. 83-84.

20. The combination of "apostle" and "missionary" is meant to include Paul, Cephas [Peter], and Apollos. Paul never calls Apollos an apostle. See further n. 22.

crucified,” “Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1:23–24).

It is highly likely that his problem with the other apostles or missionaries was in large part that one or more of them was an expert rhetorician who had a much better education in Greek persuasive speech. Perhaps he could quote from classical Greek texts at the appropriate moment, rather than just from the Greek translation of Jewish Scripture. Such a person could be said to speak in the “lofty words” that usually counted as “wisdom.” This hypothetical orator had drawn the loyalty of some of the Corinthians away from Paul.

After mentioning Christ, Cephas, Apollos, and himself in 1:12–13, Paul does not refer to the inexplicable Christ party again. In 3:21–22 he advises his converts not to boast about human leaders and names the other three parties: himself, Apollos, and Cephas. He mentions the travels of Cephas, “the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord” in 9:5, which may indicate that Cephas had actually been in Corinth.

But in 1 Corinthians, Paul’s principal problem seems to be with Apollos. After disposing of wisdom, he returns to schisms: “When one says, ‘I belong to Paul,’ and another, ‘I belong to Apollos,’ are you not merely human?”—rather than spiritual (3:4). There follows a long passage threatening Apollos (3:5–4:7), which is followed by another criticism of the Corinthians and a second justification of himself (4:8–20), in which he also threatens the Corinthians (“Am I to come to you with a stick, or with love?” 4:21).

The heart of Paul’s warning against Apollos is found in 3:5–17, where Paul uses three metaphors. We see here and elsewhere that the great apostle was not very good at figures of speech, though his points are usually quite clear. In the present case, he compares the Corinthians first to a field: he planted, Apollos watered, but God gives the growth (3:5–9). Both the one who plants and the one who waters are important, “and each will receive wages according to the

labor of each” (3:8). It is not quite clear that the one who plants (himself) is more important than the one who waters (Apollos); in actual gardening both are required.

Probably in pursuit of clarity, Paul changes metaphors: from “you are God’s field,” to you are “God’s building” (3:9). Paul is the master builder, who laid a foundation, Jesus Christ. Someone else is building on it.

Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. (3:12–13)

Now comes the threat:

If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire. (3:14–15)

Here Paul utilizes a standard Jewish view of deeds and the world to come. Good deeds and bad deeds do not save or condemn, but God will nevertheless repay people appropriately (so also 3:8). In this case, Paul envisages the repayment as taking place at the judgment. If what Apollos builds is “wood, hay, or straw,” his work will be destroyed and he will be *punished*, though he will still be saved.²¹

In the third metaphor, Paul becomes even more threatening:

Do you not know that you [plural: the community] are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple. (3:16–17)

Thus he moves from viewing Apollos as a fairly good farmer, watering the field, to a somewhat suspect builder, who is in danger of

21. Compare the later Christian view of purgatory.

punishment if he does not build well, to a potential destroyer of the community, whom God will destroy.

Paul even entertains the possibility that he himself will be punished at the judgment: “I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me” (4:4). When the Lord comes, he will “bring to light the things now hidden” (4:5). Then, just to make sure that the Corinthians understood his three metaphors and his warnings, he adds, “I have applied all this to Apollos and myself” (4:6).

While unwilling to claim absolutely that his own work is *perfect*, he is more concerned about Apollos. We shall soon see how he writes when he is entirely convinced that a competitor is doing the wrong thing, and the section on Apollos will appear to be quite mild.

Moving away from Paul’s shifting rhetoric, in which his evaluation of Apollos seems to become increasingly negative, we may generalize: he was worried about Apollos’s influence in the Corinthian church. At the end of 1 Corinthians, Paul indicates that he is still willing to regard Apollos as an ally, since he had urged him to return to Corinth “with the other brothers” (16:12).

When Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, as we saw above, he intended to visit the churches in Macedonia and then come to Corinth (16:5). In fact, probably because he was so concerned, he went to Corinth first. This was the “painful visit” that is reflected in 2 Corinthians 10–13, to which we now turn.

The Painful Visit and Letter: 2 Corinthians 10–13

During this visit, Paul found the situation to be worse than he had thought. Since he does not name names, we do not know whether the competing apostles²² were the same as in 1 Corinthians

22. In 2 Corinthians 11, the competitors are called “apostles,” either “super-apostles” or “false apostles.” It would be a mistake to assume that therefore these opponents were among the

(Cephas and Apollos), or whether a new set had come to Corinth after Chloe's people and the three Corinthian men had visited him in Ephesus. In any case, he lashes out at his competitors and warns the Corinthians menacingly. He is by turns sarcastic, threatening, self-justifying, boastful, pleading, and angry. I shall give a few examples of each:

Sarcasm

- I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away! (2 Cor. 10:1)
- You gladly put up with fools, being wise yourselves! For you put up with it when someone makes slaves of you, or preys upon you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or gives you a slap in the face. To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that! (11:19-21a)
- How have you been worse off than the other churches, except that I myself did not burden you? Forgive me this wrong! (12:13)

Threats

- We are ready to punish every disobedience when your obedience is complete. (10:6)
- Their end will match their deeds. (11:15)
- I may have to mourn over many who previously sinned and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and licentiousness that they have practiced. (12:21)
- I warned those who sinned previously and all the others, and I

twelve apostles specified by Acts 1:21-26. Rather, Paul's use of the word "apostle" is probably broader than that of Acts. See pp. 98-99.

warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again, I will not be lenient. (13:2)

Self-justification

- We were not overstepping our limits. . . . We do not boast in the labors of others. . . . (10:14-15)
- Did I take advantage of you through any of those whom I sent to you? (12:17)

Boasts

- I think that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles. I may be untrained in speech, but not in knowledge. . . . (11:5-6)
- But whatever anyone dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that. (11:21b)
- If I wish to boast, I will not be a fool, for I will be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it . . . even considering the exceptional character of the revelations. (12:6)

Pleas

- I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me! I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I promised you in marriage to one husband, to present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by its cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. (11:1-3)
- I do not want what is yours but you. . . . I will most gladly spend and be spent for you. (12:14-15)

What were the other apostles doing that called forth the emotional

torrent in 2 Corinthians 10–13? In one verse it seems that they preached another message:

If someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you submit to it readily enough. (11:4)

But we hear nothing more of this different Jesus or different gospel. Paul immediately launches into a prolonged attack on the other apostles' *behavior*, coupled with self-justification and boasting designed to show that he was “not in the least inferior to these super-apostles” (11:5 and the rest of chap. 11). That is, the conflict seems to have been personal rather than theological. This is quite a different sort of attack from that of Galatians, which (as we shall see) is deeply theological as well as personal. In 2 Corinthians 10–13 we learn even less about theological issues than we learned about the teaching of “wisdom” in 1 Corinthians: this time, we learn nothing at all.

One aspect of 2 Corinthians 10–13 that shows continuity with 1 Corinthians is that Paul has to defend himself against those who criticize or ridicule his speaking ability. We recall his admitting that he did not speak “in lofty words or wisdom” (1 Cor. 2:1–5). In 2 Corinthians he writes that “they say, ‘His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible’” (10:10). He replies, “I may be untrained in speech, but not in knowledge” (11:6). This exchange leads us to suspect that Apollos was still being held up as a superior apostle. In his next letter (2 Cor. 1–7), however, Paul asks whether or not he needs “letters of recommendation” “as some do” (2 Cor. 3:1). This opens the possibility that new apostles had arrived, possibly from Jerusalem (see below), with letters from authorities there.

In 2 Corinthians 11, there are several phrases that describe the

opponents. They are “super-apostles” (11:5) and “false apostles,” “disguising themselves as apostles of Christ,” but actually ministers of Satan (11:13–15). These verses have led some scholars to think that Paul actually faced two different groups, on the grounds that he would not describe the same group as both “super-apostles” and “false apostles” and that he would not claim superiority to or equality with people who are servants of Satan (11:6, 12).²³ This attributes to Paul, however, the sort of concern with precision and consistency to which scholars aspire, but which does not characterize the great apostle. We note that his reply to the super-apostles is that he was not deficient in knowledge (11:6) and that he did not take money from the Corinthians, apparently implying that they did (11:7–11). Paul boasts of working free of charge (11:10). He then denies that the **super-apostles** are his equals, though they boast that they are (11:12), but then continues, saying apparently of the same group, “such boasters [the super-apostles] are **false apostles**, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ” (11:13). That is, boasting characterizes both the super-apostles and the false apostles. Moreover, after referring to his enemies as **false apostles**, he proceeds to boast of his own apostolic merits (11:16–12:10), after which he repeats that he is “not at all inferior to these **super-apostles**” (12:11). This is a prolonged attack against the same opponents.

The best reading of 2 Corinthians 11 and 12 is that there is one group of competing apostles, who claim to be superior to him, and whom he regards as fraudulent. In anger, he even charges that they are servants of Satan. We should note that, just as Paul calls the competing apostles in Corinth “false apostles,” he calls his opponents

23. Ernst Käsemann and C. K. Barrett, among others, have argued for two different groups of apostles, one “super,” the other “false.” See the summary in Barrett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 30–31. See Barrett’s bibliography, p. 28 n. 1.

in the Jerusalem church “false brothers” (Gal. 2:4), though not “servants of Satan.”

We have seen that the super but false apostles probably accepted or demanded money from the Corinthians (11:7–11), that they asserted their authority by slapping someone in the face (11:20), that one or more of them was an excellent speaker (implied by 10:10; 11:6), and that they carried letters of recommendation (3:1). We also learn that they were Jewish: “Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I” (11:22). We saw above that calling someone a “Hebrew” does not necessarily mean that he spoke Hebrew and came from Jewish Palestine, but in this instance it is probable that one or more of the competing apostles in Corinth did come from Palestine. From Galatians we know that some of the Jerusalem Christians opposed Paul, and the most natural source of letters of recommendation for traveling Christian apostles was Jerusalem. Therefore it is possible that Paul’s opposition in Corinth came from Cephas, who may have been in Corinth (see 1 Cor. 1:12; 3:21, discussed above), or from people with a letter from him, or from another leader of the Jerusalem community.

Against this identification of the opponents, there is the fact that our only firm information about opposition to Paul from within the Christian movement indicates that those who attacked him wanted to force his gentile converts to be circumcised and to limit the association of gentile Christians with Jewish Christians. This is explicitly the topic in Galatians, where Paul recounts his problems in Jerusalem and Antioch (Gal. 2:1–15). Peter, he charged, wanted the gentiles to live like Jews (2:15). We do not hear a word about this in the Corinthian correspondence. Thus we cannot make a firm connection between the opposition in Corinth, which did not concern the Jewish–gentile problem, and the opposition in Jerusalem, Antioch, and Galatia, which did. Moreover, we have seen that Paul’s

principal problem was that at least one of the apostles who had been in Corinth spoke eloquently, and that this able rhetorician was probably Apollos. It is most doubtful that Peter or the other Jerusalem apostles were eloquent in Greek.

Can we know for sure whether or not one or more of the competing apostles of 2 Corinthians 11 was from the Jerusalem church and can be identified with the opposition there to Paul's mission? We cannot be absolutely sure, but because of the references to Cephas in 1 Corinthians, we must be open to the possibility that Peter had been in Corinth and that he was one of the competing apostles. We could imagine that Peter had one problem with Paul in Antioch (Jewish Christians eating with gentile Christians) and another in Corinth, where perhaps he allied himself with Apollos. But this is extremely speculative. It is better to admit that there is a puzzle here that we cannot solve. We do not know who, apart from Apollos, had been in Corinth, or where the other competing apostles came from, or who wrote letters on their behalf.

The things that we know with a high degree of probability are these: Cephas's name was being used in Corinth; Apollos was influential there, in part because of his eloquent speech, and Paul distrusted him; someone had written letters of recommendation for some Jewish apostle or apostles (including Apollos?); these apostles boasted of their authority, took money, and lorded it over the Corinthians.

It would be convenient if we could say that the "false brothers" in Jerusalem had organized a grand conspiracy against Paul and launched two attacks at about the same time: one against his authority in Corinth, another against his version of the gospel in Galatia. But this would be fanciful. The issues do not link up. In particular, there is nothing about circumcising gentiles in the Corinthian correspondence.

Paul was jealous of the success of the false apostles, as he frankly states: “I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I promised you in marriage to one husband” (11:2). It will be helpful here to note a passage in Philippians, which Paul wrote from prison. He comments on the fact that other Christians were “made confident in the Lord by [his] imprisonment” and spoke boldly (Phil. 1:14). He continues,

Some proclaim Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill. These proclaim Christ out of love, knowing that I have been put here for the defense of the gospel; the others proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely [literally, “purely”] but intending to increase my suffering in my imprisonment. What does it matter? Just this, that Christ is proclaimed in every way, whether out of false motives or true; and in that I rejoice. (Phil. 1:14–18a)

Not only did Paul feel possessive about his converts, he seldom trusted other leaders completely. If they were engaged in his own profession, thus constituting competition, he sometimes doubted their sincerity or the purity of their motives, as is clear in this passage and also in the attack on the competing apostles in Corinth. He returns to the topic in his letter of relief, after the Corinthian crisis was over: “We have behaved . . . with frankness and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God” (2 Cor. 1:12), perhaps still comparing himself with Apollos. Similarly 2:17, obviously directed against the competition: “We are not peddlers of God’s word like so many; but in Christ we speak as persons of sincerity, as persons sent from God and standing in his presence.”

It is of course possible that the other apostles in Corinth were interested only in money and authority, but we should entertain the possibility that they were not so bad and that Paul was overreacting. Their motives may have been purer than he was willing to admit. Was there really a lot of profit to be made, or prestige to be garnered, in preaching the gospel?

An important aspect of Paul's jealousy was that he thought that the founder of a congregation should have almost exclusive authority over it. He said that he would not boast beyond his limits, but would "keep within the field that God has assigned [him]." He and his colleagues were "the *first* to come all the way" to Corinth with the gospel. He would not "boast . . . in the labors of others" (2 Cor. 10:13-15). And that is what he thought the other apostles were doing—boasting in *his* mission field. The strength of the conviction that the founder of each congregation had exclusive authority over it is also seen when he writes to the Romans from Corinth that he has "no further place . . . in these regions" (Rom. 15:22). Christianity was spreading rapidly, and he wanted to work only where no one else had gone before. He was opposed to meddling, and this helps explain his attitude toward the intruders in Corinth.

But we must also note that, as apostle to the gentiles, he claimed some rights in Rome, a church that he had *not* founded (Rom. 1:5-6, 13-15; 15:24). It appears, then, that Paul's theory of the exclusive authority of the founder varied with circumstances. Put another way: perhaps the other apostles in Corinth might have said to the Corinthians what Paul wrote to Rome: "I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish—hence my eagerness to proclaim the gospel to you also" (Rom. 1:14-15).

Paul's Boasting: Strength and Weakness

We were unable to find theological issues at stake in Paul's contest for the loyalty of the Corinthians, but we find a very interesting theological point when we look at his boasting. Boasting is one of the major topics of 2 Corinthians 10-13, and in fact it is important throughout the Corinthian correspondence. We may see this by

simply counting words. The verb “to boast,” the noun “boast,” and the noun “boasting” occur as follows:²⁴

	Rom.	1 Cor.	2 Cor.	Gal.	Phil.	1 Thess.
Verb	5	5	16 ²⁵	2	1	0
First noun	1	3	3	1	2	0
Second noun	2	1	6	0	0	1
Total	8	9	25	3	3	1

In 2 Corinthians 10–13, boasting is complicated. First, there are the boasts of the super-but-false apostles, who boast in Paul’s field (10:15–16) and, worse, boast that they are his equals (11:12–13). Second, there are Paul’s own boasts of his merits, qualifications, successes, authority, revelations, and miracles (10:8, 15; 11:16–23; 12:1–6, 12). This category includes the points that all would have regarded as apostolic *strengths*—his descent, his visions, his chronological priority in Corinth, and the like. Third, Paul boasts of his weaknesses. This is the interesting theological point, which we shall consider just below. Fourth, Paul boasts that he did not take money from the Corinthians. This too will occupy us below.

Paul’s boasting of weakness is a striking theological reversal of the theme that dominates these four chapters (2 Cor. 10–13). In 2 Corinthians 11, Paul boasts of his descent (Hebrew, Israelite, etc.), which is equal to that of his opponents (11:21b–23). But then he continues:

Are they ministers of Christ? I am talking like a madman—I am a better one; with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless floggings, and often near death. Five times I have received from the

24. The two nouns are *kauchēma* and *kauchēsis*. The first indicates primarily the substance of a boast, as in 2 Cor. 1:14, the second is the activity, as in 2 Cor. 11:10. Often, however, the nouns could be reversed with little or no change of meaning.

25. When the word “boast” occurs twice in one verse, I count it only once.

Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked. And, besides other things, I am under daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I am not indignant? If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. (11:23-30)

I regard this as one of the most striking passages in the most remarkable body of correspondence that survives from antiquity. Paul depicts himself as in danger everywhere (at sea, on rivers and roads, in cities and in rural areas) and from everyone except Pauline Christians: Jews (“my own people”), gentiles, and false brothers and sisters (Christian opponents). This is, of course, at least a little exaggerated; probably often he was completely ignored rather than persecuted, and some people received him gladly or at least courteously. As we noted above, he was not always hungry, thirsty, cold, and ill clad.²⁶ Nor were his floggings actually “countless,” since he promptly counts them.

We would like to know how the Corinthians responded to the letter and this list of Paul’s hardships. Possibly some dismissed it: he’s exaggerating; he had money from Macedonia; Phoebe bought him a new tunic and mantle; we fed him in our own houses; he was perfectly safe from bandits, since he had nothing of interest to robbers, and, besides, there hasn’t been a robbery between here and Athens in forty years; the river crossings are safe; he’s paranoid, whining, and self-centered. Paul’s enemies might also say that this

26. See pp. 140-42.

was merely more evidence that his letters were impressive, but that in person he was not equal to the other apostles.

To reconstruct the past from a one-sided correspondence, we must imagine more than one way of reading the letters. The natural inclination is to take Paul's side on every issue, and to think that the Corinthians (and Galatians) were bad Christians, perverse, blind, and so on. We shall see in the next three chapters that actually they could debate theology quite well, and they seem to have been sincere in their beliefs. Nevertheless, for one period in the first years of the church, they were ready either to dismiss Paul or to relegate him to a smaller role than he wished. This means that they did not always accept what he said, and I have tried to indicate some of their possible objections.

Despite these cautionary remarks, it is likely in the present case that many in Corinth found Paul's list of woes to be basically true and impressive—as do I. He exaggerated, but he did not lie. He had been flogged, he was often poor, he was beset on all sides. The harsh letter and Titus's visit succeeded in winning them back, which means that, although other apostles had impressed them for a while, they did not regard their first apostle as a fraud or a blowhard.

Besides its essential truthfulness, the element of this passage that makes it most convincing is that it boasts in weakness. Take that element out, and the passage looks more like mere self-pity. Following the passage just quoted (2 Cor. 11:23–30), Paul boasts of another strength, his visionary experiences (12:1–7a), but he returns to weakness: the Lord gave him “a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated” by the revelations (12:7). A lot of ink has been spilled trying to explain Paul's thorn in the flesh, but we are none the wiser: there is simply no other information about Paul that we can relate to this passage with confidence.²⁷ I continue with Paul's discussion of weakness:

Three times I appealed to the Lord about this [the thorn], but he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weakness, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. (2 Cor. 12:8-9)

“My grace is sufficient for you . . .” is a saying of the Lord, heard in prayer, not learned from those who were apostles before him.²⁸ This interpretation of weakness turns it to Paul’s advantage. He was “nothing” (although he was better than the super-apostles, 11:23; 12:11), but nevertheless he had an effective career as apostle. Therefore God’s power was being revealed in his own weakness.

This is a way of establishing his authority, since the point is that God must be working in him, but the appeal to weakness is also connected to an important part of his theology. In 1 Corinthians, Paul had already argued that he had come to the Corinthians “in weakness and in fear and in much trembling,” and had spoken without eloquence, but had nevertheless demonstrated the Spirit and power, “so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God” (1 Cor. 2:3-5). God acted through what is counted as foolishness by gentiles, Jesus’ crucifixion (1:23-24).

For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength. . . . God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God. (1:25-29)

Thus Paul’s boasting in his own weakness in 2 Corinthians 10–13

27. I cite one suggestion in order to illustrate the problem. In appealing to the Galatians to come back to his side, Paul remembers their past loyalty: “you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me” (Gal. 4:15). Does this prove that he had eye trouble, or is it only a figure of speech?
28. On the importance of this passage for understanding how new sayings of Jesus were created, see E. P. Sanders and Margaret Davies, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels* (London: SCM, 1989), 139–40.

refers back to his previous discussion of wisdom and foolishness in 1 Corinthians 1–2, where he equated foolishness with weakness. The supreme example of “foolishness” and “weakness” was the crucifixion of Jesus, by which God intended to save the world. In a similar way, God acted through Paul’s weakness, and of that he boasted (2 Cor. 12:9).

This use of weakness is similar to Paul’s view of suffering. We recall from the study of 1 Thessalonians that (in Paul’s view) being a Christian involved imitating the suffering of Christ. We now see that Jesus’ crucifixion was also “weakness,” and that Paul’s afflictions (2 Cor. 11:23–7) were an important part of his “weakness.” Paul in this way too was an imitator of Christ. Suffering, foolishness, and weakness, as exemplified both by Jesus and Paul, were chosen by God, whose power was manifest in them.

Finally, we note the earliest hint of the view that Christians *die with Christ*. Paul points out that Christ was “crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God.” He continues, “For we are weak in him, but [in dealing with] you we will live with him by the power of God” (2 Cor. 13:4).²⁹ “We are weak in him” at least implies sharing Christ’s death, since the preceding line stated that Christ was “crucified in weakness.” This idea, however, seems at this point to refer only to Paul himself, not to all Christians. In this passage, the word “we” is contrasted with “you,” the Corinthians. Paul will not make the explicit statement that Christians share the suffering and death of Christ until Galatians.

The Painful Letter, Continued: Revelations, Ecstasy

In 2 Cor. 12:1–7a, Paul boasts of visions and revelations. In 12:2–5 it sounds as if he is speaking of someone else:

29. There are important textual variants. A major manuscript has “weak *with him*” rather than “in him”; some major manuscripts add “unto you” at the end of the verse.

I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows. And I know that such a person . . . was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat. On behalf of such a one I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses.

It appears, however, that this person was Paul himself. According to 12:1, he is boasting of “visions and revelations,” and the word *boasting* seems to imply that he himself had experienced the visions and revelations. It is most telling that in verses 6–7 he states that he could truthfully boast but will not, “even considering the exceptional character of the revelations.” Speaking of the recipient of these revelations in the third person was probably an attempt at modesty.

The “third heaven” and “Paradise,” where Paul received revelations, are apparently the same. We cannot be certain what cosmological scheme Paul had in mind. It was generally thought that there were higher and higher hemispheres in heaven. To the observer untutored in modern science, the sky appears to take a hemispherical shape, as in the common phrase “the vault of heaven.” It is then easy to imagine a series of vaults through which one might ascend. This notion was extremely widespread, but there was no single fixed view of how many vaults there were. We do not know whether Paul thought of the third heaven as the highest or as coming just below the midpoint of a seven-vault scheme. In particular we do not know whether or not Paul thought that God himself, with Christ at his right hand, dwelt in the third heaven. A conceivable scheme would be that the stars were located on or in the first vault, angels were in the second, and God was in the third. In this case, Paul heard either God or his Son speak. But, in a seven-heaven scheme, his information would have come from a source lower than God himself.

“Paradise” was originally a Persian word referring to a nobleman’s

garden. The word, however, entered both Hebrew and Greek well before Paul's time, and it came to refer to the state of bliss that many hoped for after death. Jewish eschatologists frequently thought that the future age would be like the original state of humanity. Since Adam and Eve started out in a perfect garden, many thought that in the eschatological period the world would again be like a garden. This is probably the logic that lies behind the use of the word *Paradise* to indicate the future dwelling place of the elect (as in Luke 23:43).

There are a lot of visionary texts that depict tours of the heavens, though only seldom may we suspect that the author is describing his own experience, as we do in the case of Paul.³⁰ Philo describes an ecstatic experience in which the mind leaves "the prison of the body," escapes from "its fetters into liberty" and journeys "outside the prison walls." (The body is the "prison.") He urges his soul to leave the body, the senses, and speech itself.

Like persons possessed and corybants,³¹ be filled with inspired frenzy, even as the prophets are inspired. For it is the mind which is under the divine afflatus, and no longer in its own keeping, but is stirred to its depths and maddened by heavenward yearning, drawn by the truly existent [God] and pulled upward thereto, with truth to lead the way and remove all obstacles . . . such is the mind, which has this inheritance [of divine things].³²

30. For related texts, see James Tabor, *Things Unutterable: Paul's Ascent to Paradise in its Greco-Roman, Judaic, and Early Christian Contexts* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986), chap. 3; Barrett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 310–11.

31. More usual spellings are Corybantes and Korybantes, Greek *korybant-*: originally priests of the Phrygian goddess Cybele, who engaged in emotive or frenzied dancing, accompanied by suitable music, in order to cure mad or disturbed people by imitating their symptoms. Similar activities were found in the Greek worship of Dionysos. According to E. R. Dodds, "by the fifth century the Corybantes . . . had developed a special ritual for the treatment of madness," which apparently became independent of the worship of Cybele. For discussion and sources, see E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, repr. (1951; Boston: Beacon, 1966), 77–79, 96 n. 90; Erwin Rohde, *Psyche*, ET, 1925, pp. 286–87 and notes (pp. 306–309). Philo connects these activities to divine "possession." Today some Christian groups interpret rhythmic gyrations, fainting, and the like as signs that a person is possessed by the Holy Spirit.

32. Philo, *Who is the Heir of Divine Things*, 68–74, here 68–70. See also *Allegorical Interpretation* 3.84.

This may be an account of Philo's own ecstatic experiences.

Further to exemplify the genre of heavenly tours, and also to illustrate the use of "third heaven" and "Paradise," I cite a few lines from *2 Enoch*. This text was probably written in the late first century CE, after Paul's letters, but there is no reason to think that the author had 2 Corinthians before him when he wrote. This is most likely an independent use of the two terms used by Paul.

And those men [who were conducting "Enoch" on a tour of the heavens] took me from there, and they brought me up to the third heaven, and set me down [there]. Then I looked downward, and I saw Paradise. And that place is inconceivably pleasant. And I saw the trees in full flower. And their fruits were ripe and pleasant-smelling, with every food in yield and giving off profusely a pleasant fragrance.³³

It is to be noted that this author distinguishes the third heaven from Paradise, while Paul apparently equates them. And *2 Enoch* describes Paradise as a garden, whereas Paul gives no information about his visionary tour of the heavens, except the fact that he heard things that humans cannot speak.

As James Tabor has shown, this passage on Paul's visit to the third heaven, or to Paradise, is very important in revealing to us a substantial but often neglected aspect of Paul's thought and apostleship—his spiritual or mystical attainments. I shall not be able to go into the subject fully here, but I shall indicate some of the main points.³⁴

Paul was in many respects a strongly rational and practical man. Most of the present book, and in fact most books on Paul, are about the rational, practical Paul. Consequently, the rational side of him needs no special proof, though I shall mention a few points by way of

33. Quoted from the translation by F. I. Andersen in James Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983–85), 1:114.

34. I strongly recommend reading Tabor's compact book, *Things Unutterable*.

reminder. He organized the itineraries of himself and his colleagues, founded congregations, worked with his hands, argued on the basis of fundamental theology (such as the sovereignty of God and the death of Jesus), and proved points by appealing to Scripture.³⁵ As did virtually all people in the ancient world, he believed in God and other supernatural beings, and he thought that God had revealed himself in the past (of polytheists, we would say that they believed in the gods, who had revealed themselves in various ways in the past). As could most people, Paul communicated with God in prayer, and sometimes God answered. I include these beliefs in the supernatural under the general heading “rational,” since they were so widespread—though probably relatively few people actually heard God answer prayer in such a way that they could quote him, as Paul does in 2 Cor. 12:8-9.

But there was another side of Paul, which we might call mystical, charismatic, sacramental, and visionary. He was, or he thought himself to be, in touch with the divine in a personal and immediate way. In some ways Christ *possessed* him. He had been crucified with Christ and could say, “it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me” (Gal. 2:19-20; similarly 2 Cor. 4:10; 13:3-4, both discussed below).

Alternatively, he could say that the Spirit was in him (1 Cor. 2:12) and spoke through him. Thus he could speak in tongues (1 Cor. 14:18), and he could also speak things that he had been “taught by the Spirit” (1 Cor. 2:13). As one who was spiritual, he could “discern all things” and was “subject to no one else’s scrutiny.” In short, he had “the mind of Christ” (2:15-16). Therefore he could occasionally declare “mysteries” that had not been known before (Rom. 11:25; 1 Cor. 15:51; cf. 1 Cor. 4:1).

Paul periodically received special revelations. He became an apostle

35. We have not yet seen much of his scriptural argumentation, but this will be very evident later in this work.

because God revealed his Son to him (Gal. 1:15), and it is probably of this event that he speaks when he asks, rhetorically, “Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?” (1 Cor. 9:1). At one point in his career, God revealed to him that he should go to Jerusalem (Gal. 2:2). In the passage that led us into this topic, 2 Cor. 12:1–7, he refers to “visions and revelations” in verse 1 and to the “exceptional character of the revelations” in verse 7. We should take the plural seriously and also the fact that he regarded the revelations that he received as going well beyond other peoples’ revelatory moments. The revelation of which he speaks in 2 Corinthians 12 was, we may assume, dramatic and substantial even by Paul’s standards, since he has to go back fourteen years in order to cite it (12:2). In all the other cases listed in the previous paragraph, Paul gives the content of the revelation or says in general that he teaches what he learns from the Spirit, but in this case he states that he heard “things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat” (12:4).

The charismatic, mystical, visionary side of Paul is important in three ways in 2 Corinthians 10–13. The first is the most obvious: Paul can boast of his revelations in his conflict with the super-apostles, and the conflict explains why we have this passage on Paul’s ascent to the third heaven. Second, his contact with the divine gave him special *powers* other than the forceful rhetoric that is so evident in his letters. Third, and closely related to both the preceding points, Paul’s very special spiritual gifts were a major source of his apostolic authority. We shall consider the second and third points a little further.

Special Powers

In 2 Cor. 10:1–11 Paul threatens the Corinthians by claiming that he can do things when present that will punish the disobedient and that they will learn that he is powerful in person as well as in writing.

He then refers to *cognitive* success. He can “destroy arguments” and anything raised against the *knowledge* of God; he has the power to “take every *thought* captive” (10:4–5). If this passage were all we knew, we would conclude that Paul meant that he could defeat his enemies *in argumentation* face-to-face as well as by letter, and this may be part of his meaning: God would give him the power to be impressive in using words when in Corinth. The following passage is also relevant:

I warned those who sinned previously and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again, I will not be lenient—since you desire proof that Christ is speaking in me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful in you. For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God. (2 Cor. 13:2–4)

As in 10:1–11, the only specification is *speech*: Christ speaks through Paul. Thus when Paul wrote that Christ lives, and that in dealing with the Corinthians he, Paul, will live with him, he might mean merely that Christ will give him the right words to use when he next goes to Corinth. But, as we saw above, Paul could also do “signs and wonders and mighty works” (2 Cor. 12:12; similarly 1 Cor. 2:4; 4:19–20; 1 Thess. 1:5; Rom. 15:19), phrases that in general point toward miracles and away from speech (cf. pp. 121–24). One Greek word, *dynamis*, appears in all these passages. It is translated as “power,” “miracle,” or “mighty work.” Paul frequently contrasts *dynamis* (power, miracle) with *logos*, which is translated “speech,” “talk,” or “word.” In 1 Thess. 1:5 Paul reminds his converts that he came to them “not in word [*logos*] only, but also in power [*dynamis*] and in the Holy Spirit.” In 1 Cor. 2:4, he contrasts “plausible words [plural of *logos*]³⁶ of wisdom”

36. The important papyrus P46 and a few other manuscripts omit *logois*, but it is present in the majority of the best manuscripts.

with “a demonstration of the Spirit and of power [*dynamis*].” In 1 Cor. 4:19–20, he writes, “I will find out not the talk [*logos*] of these arrogant people but their power [*dynamis*]. For the kingdom of God depends not on talk [*logos*] but on power [*dynamis*].”

In view of this contrast between speech and power, we return to 2 Cor. 13:2–4. There he writes that Christ speaks in him (“speak” is a verb, not the noun *logos*) and that when he confronts the Corinthians he will live with Christ “on the basis of the power [*dynamis*] of God.”³⁷ Because of the frequent contrast between talking and performing “mighty works,” we may suspect that Paul thought that he could demonstrate and enforce his authority in ways other than speaking. Paul shared Christ’s life, and Christ worked in and through him. Therefore Paul could demonstrate power even though he was *not* an effective speaker. This is probably one of the meanings of 2 Cor. 13:2–4, and I further propose that Paul’s view that he lived with Christ, and that Christ lived in him, reflects his mystical visionary experiences. They gave him more spiritual powers than other people had.

Special Gifts and Authority

The previous point is obviously important for Paul’s feeling of authority over the Corinthians. He, in whom Christ lived, could go to Corinth and demonstrate God’s (or Christ’s) power again, thus proving that he was the real apostle, and was superior to the false apostles, thereby re-establishing his authority. I must add again that from Paul’s letters we do not know at all what his powers (and signs and wonders, 12:12) were.³⁸

37. The preposition *ek* may be translated in various ways, but most fundamentally it indicates a source, and the most usual translations are “from” or “out of.” Thus “on the basis of” seems to me to be better than “live with him *by* the power of God,” since *by* in English usually indicates means or instrument rather than source.

We shall deal in other ways with Paul's mysticism and charisma when we meet them in other passages. Here I wish to offer three cautionary points in order to prevent misunderstanding.

First, the use of the word *mysticism* in discussing Paul has been strongly contested, and to avoid the controversy I previously employed the word "participationism."³⁹ I shall not discuss this fully here, but simply say that I have used "mysticism" as pointing at least generally in the right direction.⁴⁰ The basic point is that mysticism is a very widespread religious phenomenon that takes various forms, but students of the history of Christianity usually think immediately of certain medieval mystics when they hear the word. This, in turn, makes them think of surrender of self, withdrawal into meditation, and increasing otherworldliness. Paul's view that Christ lived in him made him active, even aggressive, and he certainly did not surrender his personality to the divine. Paul was a kind of mystic—his own special kind.

Secondly, Paul did not regard himself as the only person who was united with Christ and who therefore was able to live on the basis of the power of God, to perform miracles, to be an instrument of the Holy Spirit and the like. He was *especially* gifted in these ways, but in later letters he would extend much of this to his converts. They too died with Christ and lived in him (Rom. 6:5-11; Gal. 3:27-28 and frequently). We shall see in the next chapter that Paul thought that all Christians had one or more spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12-14). Some could do *dynamis*, miracles (1 Cor. 12:10, 28-29), others could speak in tongues (1 Cor. 14). This point will be greatly elaborated in further chapters. Here I note only that, although Paul thought that all Christians shared in the body of Christ and had spiritual gifts, he did

38. Above, pp. 121-24.

39. E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 434 n. 19; 440 n. 49; 460.

40. On mysticism, see further below, pp. 611-14.

not think that his converts could see the Lord, as he had (1 Cor. 9:1), or that they could become apostles (compare 1 Cor. 12:28–29 with 14:1), or that they could receive revelations that were equal to his.

Perhaps most important, he thought that he had the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16) and that he possessed the Spirit to such a degree that he could give laws on marriage and divorce that partly disagreed with and partly supplemented those of Jesus (1 Cor. 7:12, 40). He could also simply give his converts commandments or rules (1 Cor. 7:17; 11:34; 16:1).⁴¹ They could not give them to him. Thus, on the one hand, all Christians lived in Christ and were filled with the Spirit, while on the other, Paul had an unusually close union with the Lord, and this gave him knowledge and authority that allowed him to instruct others.

The third caution is that Paul sometimes downplayed his spiritual gifts. In the main passage that we are now considering, 2 Cor. 12:1–7, he uses one of his great strengths as apostle, namely the revelations he had received, to introduce the theme of weakness. It was after narrating his trip to the third heaven (a boast) that he wrote that a thorn was put in his flesh to keep him from being too elated (p. 255 above). This led to his prayer for the thorn to be removed, and the Lord answered by saying “my power is made perfect in weakness” (12:6–9). This is extremely clever: his special attainment of being taken into the third heaven was followed by weakness.

This does not mean that Paul denigrated his spiritual gifts. On the contrary, he cited them, but then converted the theme into a discussion of his weakness and God’s use of it. If he had not prized his spiritual attainments and the revelations he had received, he would not have mentioned them at all. Paul here makes use of a rhetorical device similar to pre-iteration. An example of the latter is this: I am

41. See Tabor, *Things Unutterable*, 24–27.

not going to tell you how smart I am. The speaker here says what he claims he will not say. Similarly when Paul wrote to Philemon he stated that he would not mention the fact that Philemon owed him his life (19)—which he thereby mentioned. Thus, instead of leaving his revelations out, he put them in; but instead of saying that they proved his superiority, he reversed the theme and spoke of his weakness, which demonstrated God's power.

Above I suggested that his catalogue of hardships would have been less effective if he had not turned it toward the theological point that God works through weakness. It would have been whining self-pity. Similar remarks apply here. Paul seems to be boasting in his mystical experiences and trying to outdo the super-apostles on their own ground. This might be read as mere human boasting. But, again, he converts the theme by moving the discussion toward God's use of weakness to display his power.

Reconciliation: The Letter of Relief (2 Cor. 1–9)

Because the topic is complicated, it will be helpful to have a quick review of Paul's trips and letters to Corinth. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus after he received news from Corinth that was of concern to him. Paul intended to travel from Ephesus to Macedonia, then to Corinth for a substantial visit (1 Cor. 16:5-9). Instead, apparently anxious about the Corinthian church, he made a quick trip to Corinth first (2 Cor. 1:16). This was a painful visit, and Paul followed it up by sending a painful letter (both referred to in 2 Cor. 2:1-4). He probably sent this letter, part of which is preserved in 2 Corinthians 10-13, by Titus, and then he went to Troas (in Asia Minor) to await Titus's report. Titus did not arrive. Troubled, Paul went to Macedonia (2 Cor. 2:12-13). There he encountered more trouble: "disputes without and fears within" (2 Cor. 7:5). Titus,

however, found Paul in Macedonia and reported that the Corinthian crisis was over.

It was Titus's good report that led Paul to write the "letter of relief" or "of reconciliation," which we now find in 2 Corinthians 1–9 (or possibly 1–7).⁴² In this letter he commented on his previous harsh letter (2 Cor. 10–13):

Even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it (though I did regret it, for I see that I grieved you with that letter, though only briefly). Now I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because your grief led to repentance; for you felt a godly grief, so that you were not harmed in any way by us. (2 Cor. 7:8–9)

Paul, in short, won.

His principal response was pleasure and relief, despite the "disputes without and fears within" referred to immediately above (2 Cor. 7:5). He continues,

But God, who consoles the downcast, consoled us by the arrival of Titus, and not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was consoled about you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more. (7:6–7)

This echoes the theme of the opening part of the letter of relief, called the blessing, where he blesses God for consoling him in his sufferings and states that his affliction was for the "consolation and salvation" of the Corinthians (2 Cor. 1:3–7). There is no doubt that some of Paul's "affliction" was created by his strife with the Corinthians, and the "consolation" that God provided was that he saw to it that Titus saved the situation. (Suffering in these passages is treated more fully below, pp. 270–71).

In the letter of relief (2 Cor. 1–7 or 1–9), Paul refers to one

42. On the question of the "integrity" of 2 Corinthians 1–9 (whether all these chapters were written at once), see above, pp. 236–37 and below, pp. 433–38.

individual in Corinth who seems to have been at the center of the problem.

If anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but . . . to all of you. This punishment by the majority is enough for such a person; so now . . . you should forgive and console him. . . . So I urge you to reaffirm your love for him. . . . Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. (2 Cor. 2:5-10)

A few chapters later Paul returns to the offense and forgiveness: “You have proved yourselves guiltless [literally, “pure”] in the matter” (2 Cor. 7:11). Here he shows himself willing to limit the transgression to one person. Earlier, however, he had written that he might have to “mourn over [*penthein*] *many* who previously sinned and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and licentiousness that they have practiced” (2 Cor. 12:21). In light of the letter of reconciliation, however, it may be that only one person was engaging in sexual immorality and that the fault of “many” was that they supported him. To see this, we turn back to a passage in 1 Corinthians:

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans; for a man is living with his father’s wife. And you are arrogant! Should you not rather have mourned [*penthein*] so that he who has done this would have been removed from among you? (1 Cor. 5:1-2)

We can make a tentative proposal about these passages (in chronological order, 1 Cor. 5:1-2; 2 Cor. 12:21; 2 Cor. 2:5-10; 2 Cor. 7:11): one man sinned sexually by living with his stepmother, and he was supported by several members of the church, who were arrogant (see further below, pp. 549-51). Paul thought that this man should be expelled from the church, which would throw him (Paul) into “mourning” (1 Cor. 5:2). During Paul’s painful visit, however,

the man refused to change, and some or most of the church members supported him. Paul wrote, in his harsh letter, that on his next visit he might have to expel “many” and “mourn” over them because of their sexual immorality (2 Cor. 12:21), although the “many” merely supported the one actual transgressor. After the letter and Titus’s visit, the man finally repented, and the majority, instead of expelling him, punished and forgave him (punishment, 2 Cor. 7:11; 2:6; forgiveness, 2:7–10). Paul accepted this solution, saying both that they (plural) repented and that they proved themselves “pure” (2 Cor. 7:9–11). This is a nice compromise that does not insist on blaming the majority. Paul then also forgave the one real transgressor (2 Cor. 2:10).

This reconstruction, while only tentative, seems to explain these four passages on sexual immorality, expulsion, repentance, and forgiveness. The case of the man living with his father’s wife may also have been the issue behind alpha Corinthians. This is our designation for the lost letter to which Paul refers in 1 Corinthians: “I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral persons . . . Now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother or sister who is sexually immoral . . .” (1 Cor. 5:9–11). It is, of course, possible that the issue changed: possibly the sexual immorality that triggered α Corinthians had nothing to do with the man mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5; possibly that letter was effective, and when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, he knew of only one man who was transgressing sexually (1 Cor. 5); perhaps on his second visit he found a lot of such cases (2 Cor. 12). One might also suppose that after Paul’s harsh letter and Timothy’s visit, the majority regretted some other action and punished some other man (2 Cor. 2:7). A connection is, however, better: there was a stubborn case of legal incest, which the Corinthians supported until finally they were persuaded to come into line with Paul’s view. This will appear even

likelier when we examine 1 Corinthians 5 more closely in the next chapter.

There are two other noteworthy continuities between 2 Corinthians 10–13 and 2 Corinthians 1–7. The first is Paul’s argument about his affliction and God’s power, with which he connects his special feeling of union with Christ.

But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power [*dynamis*] belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you. (2 Cor. 4:7–12)

This recalls the catalogue of woes in 2 Cor. 12:23b–29, as well as the conversion of Paul’s suffering and weakness into a display of the power of God. We note that Paul, to a much greater degree than the Corinthians, bore the death of Jesus in his body (4:10). This recalls the theme of Paul’s union with Christ, which is proved by his afflictions.

The second major continuity between 2 Corinthians 10–13 and 1–7 is boasting. Boasting was a main issue in the painful letter, 2 Cor. 10–13. In the letter of reconciliation (chaps. 1–7) Paul boasted of the Corinthians to Titus, and of Titus to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 7:14). Most to the point, he returns to the question of the boasting of people who “commend themselves,” partly by carrying letters of recommendation and partly by boasting of their spiritual attainments.

- Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Surely we do not need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you or from you, do we? (2 Cor. 3:1)

- We are not commending ourselves to you again, but giving you an opportunity to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast in outward appearance and not in the heart. (2 Cor. 5:12)

He is still trying to turn the question of boasting and outward appearance (cf. “his bodily presence is weak,” 10:10) to his own advantage, this time by urging the Corinthians to boast in him, thereby resisting the enticements of his competitors.

Second Corinthians 1–7 reveals two of the things that Paul cared about most: the moral rectitude of his converts (renouncing sexual immorality) and loyalty to him. If these two items were satisfactory, he could forego his assault on the other apostles, of whom we hear very little in the letter of reconciliation. They appear only in the two passages on “commendation” (quoted just above), which do not include a direct attack on his competitors. Possibly he achieved “victory” only by emphasizing the points on which he won, while almost entirely ignoring the super-but-false prophets. It may well be that the Corinthians did not entirely give up their appreciation of Apollos and the other leaders who had appeared in Corinth.

We now turn to the important theological topics of 1 Corinthians, one of which (resurrection) is picked up again in 2 Corinthians 4–5.

The Corinthian Correspondence, Part 2: Spiritual Gifts, Behavior at Church Meetings, Marriage, and Some Sexual Topics

The Questions of the Corinthians

In 1 Corinthians, Paul discusses a large number of major issues, all of which were apparently raised by the Corinthians. Previously we noted that when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, he had been there only once, on his founding visit. During an extended stay in Ephesus, he received information about his fledgling community from three sources: Chloe's people (1:11), a letter from the Corinthians (7:1), and a visit from three men (Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, 16:17).

We recall that Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians very soon, possibly only a few months, after he founded the congregation. There was a longer span of time between the founding of the Corinthian church and

Paul's first surviving letter to Corinth, probably a few years, since he had been to Syria and back.¹ More had happened in Corinth, and many questions had arisen. These cover a wide range of topics, which make 1 Corinthians the most varied and in some ways the most interesting of Paul's surviving letters. It reveals more about the problems that Paul's churches faced in their social setting than any other source.

From the long list of topics, we also derive an important piece of information about how Paul viewed his mission. He seems not to have given very specific instructions about behavior during his founding visits, and so he had to answer a lot of questions by letter. Above, we noted that this is one of the points that calls into question the view of Acts, that Paul grew up in Jerusalem and studied under Gamaliel. Had he done so, we might suppose that he would have learned how to formulate *halakôt*, rules for behavior (p. 42 above).

Paul regarded correct behavior as being partly self-evident and partly automatic. People who lived in the Spirit should also produce the fruits of the Spirit: since good trees automatically produce good fruit, it should not be necessary to give dozens of rules (see, e.g., Gal. 5:22–23; 2 Cor. 9:10; Phil. 1:11; Rom. 7:4–6; 8:4–6). If people proved not to be like fruit trees, then they ought to be able to apply few general principles (love one another, do good to all, and the like) to each case with no difficulty. Good behavior would be self-evident, once the heart and the head were right.

It turned out, however, that Paul's view of the partially automatic and always self-evident behavior that should characterize Christians was deeply informed by Diaspora Judaism, while the gentile Corinthians, following Paul's own principles, sometimes came to very un-Jewish conclusions. We saw above that Paul thought that

1. See the discussion of his trips above, pp. 234–37.

God had not sent him to baptize (1 Cor. 1:14–17), and we now learn that God also did not send him to distribute handbooks on behavior. Paul’s general admonitions, which he probably did give to each church, included these: live by the Spirit, love your neighbor, imitate me (or Christ, or both), and be blameless. He may also have listed vices, as 1 Corinthians contains several vice lists. We shall see these principles and Paul’s vice lists in the sections that follow.

We shall spend four chapters on the questions of the Corinthians. In this chapter we shall consider gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12–14); church meetings and (very briefly) the Lord’s Supper, or Eucharist (14:26–33); women’s behavior in church (1 Cor. 11, 14); marriage and some topics under sex (1 Cor. 7; 5; and elsewhere). In chapter twelve we shall treat the Lord’s Supper more fully and also consider food offered to idols (1 Cor. 8, 10). Chapter thirteen will be dedicated to some of the subtopics under sex, especially vice lists and homosexual intercourse. Chapters fourteen and fifteen will take up the resurrection and related topics.

Spiritual Gifts (1 Cor. 12–14)

We start with this topic both because it is relatively simple and also because it was basic to the problems in Corinth. Paul thought that the Spirit of God dwelt in Christians and that they therefore had spiritual gifts, which he called *pneumatika* (e.g., 1 Cor. 12:1) or *charismata* (e.g., 12:6). The first word means literally “spiritual things,” the second “things [bestowed by] grace.” The word *pneuma* in Greek means either “wind” or “spirit,” and we have it in English in the first meaning: pneumatic tires are filled with wind. Paul generally used *pneuma* to refer to the Spirit of God. We use “charismatic” in approximately the same way as Paul used *charismata*, though in English it is often both weaker and more limited than in Greek:

“charisma” sometimes means no more than that a person has a sparkling personality. Paul’s usage was closer to the meaning of *charis*, “grace,” and to him *charismata* were gracious gifts from God.

Paul prepares to deal with a specific problem about spiritual gifts by offering first a general and somewhat theoretical discussion of them: there is only one Spirit; all Christians receive gifts from the Spirit; all these gifts are equally important (chap. 12). He offers the human body as an analogy: a hand is just as much a part of the body as is the eye. “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (12:27). To this point, Paul has been emphasizing equality (see especially 12:7–11), and from this we may infer that some Corinthians were boasting of their super spiritual gifts, while others were being made to feel inferior.

But the argument then takes a surprising turn, and we learn that Paul was engaged in a polemic against people who boasted of one spiritual gift in particular, and that he was keen to reorder their priorities. Not all gifts are in fact equal:

God has appointed in the church *first* apostles, *second* prophets, *third* teachers; *then* deeds of power [*dynaméis*], *then* gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? . . . (12:28–29)

Here Paul ranks the gifts, putting his own status, apostleship, first, and speaking in tongues last. He continues by urging the Corinthians to strive for the *greater* gifts (12:31). In 14:1, we learn that the highest of the gifts in this list to which they may aspire is prophecy: they cannot be apostles. The point of ranking the gifts at the end of chapter 12, then, is in part to assert his own superior status.

There is also a negative edge: tongues (*glossolalia*) are last. That speaking in tongues is the target becomes clear as Paul begins his most famous chapter, 1 Corinthians 13, on love. “If I speak in the

tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal” (13:1). In this brilliant and stirring section, he relativizes all the gifts that he had listed in chapter 12, which ends with the statement that love is “a more excellent way” (12:31). In 13:2-3, he points out that speaking in tongues, prophesying, understanding mysteries, and even having faith, without love, amount to nothing. Love, unlike prophecy and tongues, is eternal (13:8). The chapter concludes: “and now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love” (13:13).

It appears that the discussion is over. Paul has made several excellent points: all Christians have gifts of the Spirit; all gifts are equally essential, and all members of the body of Christ are necessary parts of the whole; nevertheless, gifts can be ranked, and tongues are inferior to other gifts; all are worthless without love. What else is there to say? As is often the case, Paul thinks of quite a bit more. He continues, this time discussing speaking in tongues more extensively.

- Pursue love and strive for the spiritual gifts, and especially that you may prophesy. For those who speak in a tongue do not speak to other people but to God (14:1-2a).
- If in a tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is being said? (14:9)
- If . . . the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if all prophesy . . . (14:23).

To solve the problem of being excessively proud of speaking in tongues, Paul, besides making this the least important gift, adds specific limitations:

If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn; and let one interpret. But if there is no one to interpret, let them be silent in church and speak to themselves and to God. (14:27-28)

From Paul's discussion, we learn that speaking in tongues was babbling unintelligibly. The book of Acts makes it more socially respectable: speaking in tongues meant that listeners from diverse countries could understand what was being said, as if the apostles spoke in several foreign languages simultaneously (Acts 2:1-13). Paul's complaint was that people could *not* understand what was being said.

The root problem in Corinth was that the Corinthians believed Paul when he said that the Spirit dwelt in them, and thus they were "eager for spiritual gifts" (14:12), but they rather naturally preferred the showiest, one at which Paul himself was proficient: "I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you" (14:18). That is, by speaking in tongues they were following two of his general admonitions: "live by the Spirit" and "imitate me." It was to Paul *self-evident* that the socially barren activity of speaking in tongues was less important than building up the church by speaking in normal Greek (14:3-4, 12, 19). The Corinthians probably thought that spiritual displays were good in and of themselves, and that the Spirit would not have given them a gift that they should repress: that would be quenching the Spirit (cf. 1 Thess. 5:19). They may have felt betrayed when they read Paul's letter, but if so they got over it, doubtless thanks to the eminent good sense of chapters 12-14 and the profound appeal of chapter 13 in particular.

In view of the importance of union with Christ in Paul's letters and in this study, we should pay special attention to the discussion of the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12. That Christians are in the body of Christ is stated in 12:12-13:

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

“Baptized into one body,” in which there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, will become important in Gal. 3:27-28. In 1 Corinthians 12, however, it appears that the more important conception of union has to do with the Spirit: it is the Spirit that is in the Christians (they drink of it) and that works through them by empowering each of them with a special gift.

In this chapter, the “body of Christ” does not refer to mystical union with Christ but rather functions as an analogy or a figure of speech: just as all the parts of the body (hand, foot, and the like) are necessary, so all the members of the body of Christ are necessary. The lengthy analogy between the Christian church and the parts of the body of Christ in 12:14-26 would not allow a person to say “I am a foot” or “a hand.” The analogy functions only on a general level: all members are necessary. The language of gifts of the Spirit (based on the fact that the same Spirit possessed all Christians) in 12:4-11, however, would enable each person to say which gift he or she had. That is, in terms of Paul’s budding conception of *union* with Christ or the Spirit, in this passage union with the Spirit seems more to the point. The body of Christ is more important in 1 Cor. 6:15-16 and 10:16-17, which we shall consider below.

Church Meetings and the Lord’s Supper (Chap. 11; 14:26-33)

Paul moves from speaking in tongues to other aspects of Christian assembly. First, he states what he had probably taught them when he was there: “each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation [apparently the same as a prophecy], a tongue, or an interpretation” (14:26). He then limits speaking in tongues (vv. 27-28, quoted above). Next, he

puts limits even on prophecy: "Let two or three prophets speak." "If a revelation is made to someone else sitting nearby, let the first person be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one" (vv. 29–30).

This gives an interesting and even an amusing portrait of the Corinthians at worship: there were competing speakers, some speaking in tongues, some giving prophecies or revelations, sometimes all at once. Paul, the rational, practical man, is fully in evidence here: one at a time! The point is to understand and to help others understand. "God is a God not of disorder but of peace" (v. 33); "all things should be done decently and in order" (v. 40).

There were two further problems with regard to Christian assembly: the "Lord's Supper"² and the role of women. (This title for the central Christian rite comes from 1 Cor. 11:20.)

The first problem occupies 11:20–34. The Corinthians observed the Lord's Supper as Paul had instructed (see 11:23, "I handed on to you"), but they still managed to go astray. "Each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk" (11:21; see also 11:34). "Do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?" (11:22). Paul then repeats the instruction he had previously given, which is an account of Jesus' last meal with his disciples that agrees very closely with the story in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, especially Luke.³ Obviously the Lord's Supper was generally observed in the early Christian communities. This is one of the very few times that Paul explicitly quotes a passage that is also attributed to Jesus in the Gospels.⁴ It is also clear that the Lord's Supper was a real meal rather

2. The Lord's Supper is treated more fully below, pp. 307–11.

3. Matt. 26:26–29; Mark 14:22–25; Luke 22:15–20. The striking similarity between Paul and Luke is this: "this cup . . . is the new covenant in my blood," rather than "this is the blood of the covenant," as in Mark and Matthew. Textual variants in Luke complicate the issue somewhat, but my own view is that the Nestle-Aland Greek text solves the problems correctly.

4. So also the saying on divorce (1 Cor. 7:10) and the prediction of the Day of the Lord. (1 Thess.

than a token one. Paul's discussion probably reveals the reason for which the church eventually made the meal a token only: so that all participants would be equal.

A common attitude underlies the Corinthians' enthusiasm for speaking in tongues and their feasting at the Lord's Supper: self-exaltation. This reminds us of *boasting*, the dominant problem in 2 Corinthians 10–13 and a prominent theme in 2 Corinthians 1–7. Here, however, some of the church members, not visiting apostles, are exalting themselves. We do not know how they rationalized this behavior, but possibly there is a connection between spiritual and economic superiority. Did those who spoke in tongues also eat and drink the most? Or did the economically inferior compensate by showing off spiritual gifts? There are a lot of possibilities, but unfortunately there is no evidence that allows us to answer these sociological questions.

Women in the Church (Chaps. 11, 14)

Paul had learned that one or more women in Corinth were praying or prophesying with their heads uncovered (11:5). In a very revealing passage, he disagrees with this practice. He argues as follows:

1. If a woman prays or prophesies with her head uncovered, "it is one and the same thing as having her head shaved." He continues,

For if a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or to be shaved, she should wear a veil. For a man ought not to have his head veiled, since he is the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man. (11:5–8)

4:15–17). The commandment that those who preach the gospel should get their living by it (1 Cor. 9:14) is very close to Luke 10:7, but is not a quotation.

This is extremely puzzling. It is not at first evident that being bareheaded is the same as shaving one's head, nor is it clear why a man, who reflects God, should be bareheaded, while a woman, who reflects man, should cover her head. This double reflection would seem to lead to the conclusion that men and women alike should be bareheaded in meetings of the congregation.

2. The rationale becomes a little clearer a few verses later, where Paul argues on the basis of nature:

Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is degrading to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering. (11:14–15)

This is not the teaching of nature as we understand it. Probably part of the explanation of these sentences is that Paul makes the standard assumption that current social practices are “natural.” Men in the Greco-Roman world wore short hair; statuary sometimes depicts barbarians or ancient men as being long-haired and bearded; Paul's views of the natural state of hair were determined by the hairstyles of his culture.⁵ Thus if one grants that it is “natural” for men to have short hair and for women to have long hair, then one sees how Paul arrives at the conclusion that a woman should cover her head: since “nature” gives her long hair *as a covering*, she should *cover it further* by wearing a veil. This is not a compelling argument, but it is at least understandable.

3. A woman should cover her head “because of the angels” (11:10).

5. For centuries, art has depicted first-century Palestinian Jews, especially Jesus, with long hair and flowing beard. Paul had been to Palestine, and he knew Peter and the others, yet he still thought that it was “natural” for men to have short hair—as they did throughout the Greco-Roman world. The best evidence indicates that Jews, both within Palestine and in the Diaspora, dressed and styled their hair in accordance with the prevailing mode. See further Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief* (London: SCM, 1992), 123–24 and (for pictures) plates IV and V, between pp. 220 and 221.

We can do no more than try to guess the meaning of this phrase. Possibly it refers to Gen. 6:1-2, which states that the “sons of God” (who might be understood to be angels) saw that women were fair and descended to have sexual relations with them. If Paul is thinking of this story, he probably believed that a woman should cover her head so as not to seduce angels. Or possibly he thought that women were in danger from (evil) angels and that a head-covering would protect them.

4. Finally, Paul simply asserts his authority: “If anyone is disposed to be contentious—we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God” (11:16). Paul was very adept at coming up with arguments; his argumentative ability is one of the most striking aspects of his letters. Here he seems to admit that he cannot prove his conclusion by argument, thus acknowledging that the arguments he has just produced are not decisive. And so he simply commands his followers to accept his view, which he also attributes to the other churches.

Arguments are not necessarily the same as reasons (see the discussion of “arguments,” “conclusions,” and “reasons” above, pp. xxv-xxviii). A person may hold a view for one reason and argue in favor of it by citing various kinds of evidence, which might or might not include the real reason. Here we see this very clearly, and that is why I call this section “revealing.” Paul does not disclose the actual reason for his view, and in fact he may not have known it. The appeal to “nature” may explain the matter: in Paul’s culture women wore head-coverings in public. If one will take from the library a few volumes of Greek and Roman statuary and turn the pages, one will see that the women almost always have some sort of head-covering, even if only a hairnet. From this it appears that women did not go about in public with their heads uncovered.⁶ Paul, however, is not arguing that

women should *always* cover their heads in public, but rather that they should cover their heads in church, when praying or prophesying. This makes us search a little further for the explanation of his view. It may be that Jewish women in the Diaspora covered their heads in synagogues, and this would have given Paul the “native” or “natural” view that women in religious services should cover their heads.⁷

Thus I propose that Paul’s *reason* for holding the view that he did was cultural: decent women in the Greco-Roman world covered their heads in public; in particular, Diaspora Jewish women (probably) covered their heads in synagogues; therefore Christian women should cover their heads in meetings of the congregation. This is no more than an educated guess, but it is probable that the explanation lies in Paul’s observation of customs and that the arguments that he puts forward, such as that not wearing a covering is the same as shaving the head, were not his actual reasons.

The appeal to nature in 11:14, where Paul states that it is degrading for a man to wear long hair, probably has a second nuance in addition to the obvious fact that most civilized men wore their hair short. A man who wore long hair might be signaling that he was sexually effeminate. This will not be entirely clear until we discuss homosexual activity in chapter thirteen, but it is worth noting here that males who accepted the passive role in sexual activity with other males sometimes wore their hair long, and women who wore short hair were sometimes thought to be sexually “unnatural.”⁸

6. There probably were *religious* occasions in which women were bareheaded, and one wall-painting survives that depicts a woman who is apparently being initiated into a religious cult and whose hair is long and not covered. The depiction is in the Villa of the Mysteries at Pompeii, which should appear in any book that contains pictures from that site. For example, Marcel Brion and Edwin Smith, *Pompeii and Herculaneum* (London: Elek Books, 1970), 137; John R. Clarke, *Roman Sex* (New York: Abrams, 2003).

7. If he also knew about initiation into cults (see the previous note), this would have strengthened his opinion, because he would not want his converts to look like pagan initiates.

8. See K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 78f., where one also learns that in classical Greece there might be other explanations. See further pp.

Paul was theologically radical (as we shall see in Galatians) but socially conservative. His comments on speaking in tongues show that he worried about outsiders and wanted not to offend them (14:23). As he says about food, “Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God” (1 Cor. 10:32). It was hard enough to persuade people to accept Christianity without adding practices that might have offended potential converts. Women who spoke in church with uncovered hair probably raised suspicions of one kind or another, which Paul wished his churches to avoid.

The next passage on women in chapter 14 is even more puzzling. This follows Paul’s discussion of tongues and his admonition to avoid confusion in church services:

As in all the churches of the saints, women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only ones it has reached? (1 Cor. 14:33b–36)

It is absolutely impossible to reconcile this command that women should be silent with the view that when they prayed or prophesied in church they should cover their heads. Some manuscripts—though not the ones usually followed by text critics—place verses 33 and 34 after verse 40. When this fairly slight textual problem is added to the self-contradiction, some scholars propose that verses 33b–36 are a secondary addition to the letter. If these verses were added, they may originally have been written in the margin of a manuscript and then have been inserted into the text in different places when that manuscript was copied.

142, 172; Eva Cantarella, *Bisexuality in the Ancient World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 170: women who cut their hair are acting unnaturally. On long hair on males that is braided and adorned, see Philo, *Spec. Laws* 3.37, below, pp. 358–59.

The view that women must be silent in church is also hard to reconcile with the fairly important role they play in Paul's churches and mission. Would he tell his patron, Phoebe (Rom. 16:1-2), or Chloe (1 Cor. 1:11), or Junia, who was "prominent among the apostles" (Rom. 16:7), or the other female fellow workers mentioned in Romans 16,⁹ that in church they had to remain silent? And, finally, it is today most unpalatable to have Paul come out so firmly in favor of a view of women that most of us wish to eliminate from society.

This last argument is, of course, without historical merit. Any ancient person, including Paul, accepted social and sexual distinctions (such as slavery) that are anathema to most modern people. But the other points have weight. The self-contradiction is blatant. Moreover, we know that marginal notes and supplements did sometimes make it into the text of ancient documents, and they can often be detected because they appear in different places in different manuscripts.¹⁰ Consequently I regard it as a reputable scholarly position to hold that this passage is a secondary addition to Paul's letter.

The simplest way of "saving" the passage and regarding it as being from Paul, which I (being conservative) would prefer to do, is to offer a speculation. It is possible, for example, that he answered two different questions, one about head-coverings (chap. 11) and one about one particular female member on the congregation who tried to do all the talking (chap. 14). This is completely speculative, and I mention it only to illustrate the point that we cannot be sure precisely what the circumstances were. Different questions or circumstances could produce different answers.

The contradiction concerns concrete practice. It is impossible for

9. See above, pp. 138-40.

10. Thus, for example, the story of the woman caught committing adultery, often printed as John 8:1-11, but sometimes placed elsewhere.

a woman simultaneously to observe the rule to cover her head when she speaks in church and the rule that she may not speak in church. This is quite different from the issue of consistency that rises from Paul's various theological statements, such as those on the law, which will occupy us in the discussion of Romans and Galatians. A person may hold *certain kinds of inconsistencies* together in his or her mind, but social practice has to go one way or the other. For example, I have lived my entire life by two principles: (1) nothing ventured, nothing gained; (2) better safe than sorry. These contradictory maxims cause me no intellectual difficulties, since I simply apply one in one case, the other in the other. In my own life, I have usually guessed wrong about which to apply when, but I can believe that both are true—and I still believe it. Each is true some of the time. I cannot, however, apply both of them at the same time to the same action. And that is the problem with the two passages about women speaking in the church. Speaking is an activity, and either she speaks or she does not. Thus here we have the one *true contradiction* in Paul's letters of which I am aware.

Whatever we make of 14:33b–36, I take it to be the case that women did pray and prophesy in Paul's churches, and it is beyond doubt that some of them were important fellow workers. To return to the earlier formulation of the problem, I do not think that Paul would have told Phoebe or Junia to shut up if the Spirit moved her to prophesy.

Marriage and Sex (Chap. 7, Chap. 5, 6:13-20)

Here and in chapter thirteen we enter a very large and complicated area. Paul wrote more about sex than about any other specific problem of behavior. There are several reasons for this:

1. Judaism and pagan culture disagreed on homosexual activity.

This disagreement helped lead Diaspora Jews to regard gentiles as sexually immoral.¹¹ Paul was a Jewish apostle to pagans, and so there could be conflict between him and some of his converts. We may recall here the admonition to his gentile converts in Thessalonica not to be “like the gentiles who do not know God” in sexual matters (1 Thess. 4:3–5). We shall consider homosexual activity along with Paul’s “vice lists” (lists of things not to do) in chapter thirteen.

2. Jesus had prohibited divorce, or at least remarriage after divorce, but divorce was socially acceptable in most Jewish and gentile circles.
3. Paul himself was celibate, and he thought in general that his converts should imitate him. Should they therefore be celibate?
4. Paul was a perfectionist and was rather intolerant of human error; there is a lot of room for human error in the general sphere of sexual activity. We shall see below that Paul could sometimes exercise pastoral tolerance, but his first reaction to transgression was often anger followed by threats.
5. Paul expected the return of the Lord in the very near future, and this partly determined his view of ethical issues in general, including marriage and sexual relations. Sexual abstinence (for example) was a short-term issue because the *eschaton* was at hand, and in the short term perfection was possible. His converts were not accustomed to thinking in this way. (See further the discussion of 1 Cor. 7:17–20 below.)

11. Greco-Roman society was large and diverse, and it would be easy for the critical observer to point to a lot of examples of loose sexual morals. All groups opposed adultery, but nevertheless in the elite circles of the Roman Empire, adultery was much more common than in upright Jewish circles. But on homosexual activity there was a basic disagreement between Jewish and gentile principles; see chap. 13 below.

1 Corinthians 7

We shall begin with 1 Corinthians 7, which deals with celibacy, abstinence, marriage, premarital sex, and divorce. The first verse refers to the Corinthians' letter to Paul, which may indicate that the problems that Paul addresses from chapter 7 on were all raised in the letter—though he could also have taken questions out of turn, and he might have dealt with some issues that were not in the Corinthians' letter to him.

The NRSV puts the next sentence (1 Cor. 7:2) in quotation marks: “It is well for a man not to touch a woman.” Greek manuscripts do not use quotation marks, and so it is up to translators to decide where they should appear. In the present case, we cannot tell whether Paul here quotes the Corinthians' own suggestion or begins by answering a question that he does not quote. In any case, the topic is sex, and Paul does not entirely disagree with the proposition that it would be good if people abstained from sex: the formulation, “good for a man not to touch a woman,” simply follows the ancient convention of writing about issues from the male point of view. He would not have thought to say, “it is good for a woman not to touch a male,” though the reader may justifiably think that he meant that as well.

He first gives the argument against celibacy, apparently as a concession to human needs (see below): “because of sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband” (7:2). He adds that each should have authority over the other's body—that is, that each partner should provide sex when the other partner wishes (7:3–4)—which is remarkably egalitarian for the time, since it includes both males and females. He then considers temporary abstinence, which he allows for short periods, “to devote yourselves to prayer,” but again cautions that the married couple

should “come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you” (7:5-6).

Next we learn that the preceding discussion of sexual needs and satisfaction is “by way of concession, not of command.” “I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has a particular gift from God” (7:6-7). In short, Paul thought that celibacy was best, but he appreciated the fact that this is difficult for most people, and he preferred them to marry or remain married and to have sexual relations regularly, rather than to be subject to temptation, which might lead them to engage in immoral or improper sex—usually adultery.

This same alternation between “concession” to human nature and a personal preference for sexual abstinence marks several other passages in chapter 7. It would be best if the unmarried and widows remained unmarried, as did Paul, but if self-control was too difficult they should marry (7:8-9). Later in the chapter he gives approximately the same advice to virgins (7:25-28), to men betrothed to virgins (7:36-38) and, again, to widows (7:39-40). Celibacy is better than marriage, though for most people marriage is the right solution to the problem of desire.

In favor of celibacy he also points out that married people are “anxious” about pleasing each other, while unmarried people can spend more time on “the affairs of the Lord” (7:32-35). Thus Paul’s main view of sex is perfectly clear: married sex is quite all right, and it is the only form of sex that is acceptable. Marriage is the path that should be taken by those who do not have the special gift that Paul had, the ability to remain celibate without being lured into transgression. But, still, the reader who was married may have felt that he or she was a second-rate Christian.

We must ask whether or not the advice in 1 Cor. 7:8-9, 36-38 (unmarried people should remain single, unless they are unable to

control their passions, in which case it is better to marry) conflicts with his admonition to the Thessalonians, that they should not take a wife in “the passion of desire but in holiness and honor” (1 Thess. 4:4–5, above, pp. 215–18). It seems to me that both pieces of advice could be given to couples by the same advisor, depending on the circumstances—and it is clear that in 1 Corinthians 7 Paul is considering the circumstances of his converts and the strength of their desires. To someone, he might say (as to the Thessalonians), “do not marry merely to satisfy lust.” But if they said, “We can’t stand it any longer and are going to have sex whether married or not,” he would reply, “In that case, it is better to marry.”

First Corinthians 7, which was written a few years after 1 Thessalonians, might also show that he had gained experience. Or possibly in 1 Corinthians 7 he is simply thinking more like a pastor, engaged in counseling his flock, and less like a preacher thundering from his podium. I do not think that we have here a contradiction, merely an increase in concern for the overall well-being of his converts.

In 7:10–16 Paul deals with divorce. He first gives the commandment of “the Lord”:

that the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does separate, let her remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife. (7:10–11)

This is a version of a passage that appears four times in the Gospels: Matt. 5:31–32; Luke 16:18; Matt. 19:3–12; Mark 10:2–12. The prohibition of divorce (or of remarriage after divorce) is the best-attested saying of Jesus, but, alas!, we do not know precisely what he said, since the five versions disagree somewhat. The only point that is common to all five passages is that divorce should not be followed by marriage to another person. It is less certain that Jesus intended to

prohibit divorce entirely. Here we do not have to decide what Jesus himself meant.¹² The saying as Paul has it is that neither a husband nor a wife should initiate divorce. If the woman, however, does leave her husband, she should not marry someone else. This is not repeated in the case of a husband who divorces his wife, but probably it is implied.

Paul accepts this, but he also needs to deal with a problem that Jesus did not mention: what if a believer is married to an unbeliever? Here he explicitly distinguishes between the command of “the Lord” (Jesus, 7:10) and his own rules (“I say this, not the Lord”), one of which makes a partial exception to the command of the Lord (7:12–16).

First Paul introduces the problem created by the new context of a few converts living in the midst of idolaters: it could be that only one of the partners in a marriage is a Christian. In Paul’s world, marriage between believer and non-believer was a very live possibility. It would be a quite serious problem, since the non-Christian spouse would presumably remain loyal to the city gods, which might mean bringing home meat offered to an idol (see below, on 1 Cor. 8 and 10) and offering a libation to a god before drinking wine. Should the believer not flee idolatry, and thus leave an idolatrous spouse?

Here Paul sticks with Jesus’ prohibition as best he can: the believer should not initiate a separation, but he or she should permit it if the unbeliever wants to sever the marriage (7:12–13). Despite the problems caused by having an idolater in the home, the believer should not flee, since good might come of the union. “The unbelieving husband is made holy through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy through her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean [impure], but as it is they are holy” (7:14). In 7:16 he rewords the rationale: “Wife, for all you know, you might

12. See the fuller discussion in E. P. Sanders and Margaret Davies, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels* (London: SCM, 1989), 324–28.

save your husband. Husband, for all you know, you might save your wife” (7:16).

Close attention to the passages reveals that 7:14 and 7:16 are two slightly different rationales for Paul’s view that a Christian spouse should not initiate a divorce and that the believer might save the unbeliever.

The first explanation (7:14), that sanctity is contagious, gives us a little glimpse of an important aspect of ancient religion, according to which purity or impurity might be transferred under certain conditions.¹³ As I explained above, the entire ancient world accepted purity rules,¹⁴ and all such rules treat purity and impurity as objective realities that can be acquired or removed—just like dirt. This is quite different from the subjective view that religion is about what is inside a person’s mind or heart. Ancient religion was interested in both objective and subjective purity and holiness, and so was Paul. In 7:14 we see objective purity or holiness.¹⁵ Contagion works. The believing spouse gives sanctity to the children and to the non-believing spouse. Later in 1 Corinthians, Paul mentions the practice of being baptized on behalf of the dead (15:29),¹⁶ which extends beyond the grave the notion that sanctification is transferrable. In Rom. 11:16 he writes that “if the part of the dough offered as first fruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy.” (Possibly, however, this is

13. In Jewish law, this was especially true of impurity: corpse-impurity, for example, adhered to those who touched a corpse or who were even in the same room with a corpse (Num. 19:11, 14). Open vessels that were in the room with a corpse became impure (19:15). People who had contracted corpse-impurity had to purify themselves before they could enter the temple (19:12–13).

14. Above, pp. 37–41

15. Here Paul uses terms for “sanctification” or “holiness” interchangeably with “purification.” I think that the issue is “holiness” rather than “purity” in the technical sense, but purity language was often used metaphorically. In Jewish law, “purity” and “holiness” are two different categories, though they are in some ways parallel. We do not need to sort this out here, but for clarification see Christine E. Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities. Inter-marriage and Conversion from the Bible to the Talmud* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

16. This rite is still practiced by members of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints (Mormons).

not precisely the same thing as “sanctity by contagion”; the thought may rather be representative: the part counts as the whole.)

It is noteworthy that in this explanation of why a believer should not divorce an unbeliever (contagion), it is the power of good that is effective: purity was stronger than impurity, belief stronger than unbelief. Paul seems not to have worried that contagion could go in the other direction. (This is quite different from the usual view, that impurity was sometimes contagious, but that purity was *not* contagious.)

I regard all this as a useful reminder that Paul was an ancient man, and also that he had a non-rational side. He was not exclusively concerned with what people thought, though he was convinced that what they thought mattered a good deal. In part of this discussion, he is applying the idea of contagion to a question of religious identity—people who are in Christ or are not.

The second explanation (7:16) seems to refer to the *subjective* side of religion: it is what is in a person’s mind or heart. Living together may or may not save the other person (“wife, for all you know, you might . . .”), which implies that the *influence* of the believer may save the unbeliever. In this explanation the transfer of the non-believer to the state of belief may not work, because the influence of one mind on the other is not certain. Again, however, Paul does not consider the possibility of influence going in the other direction: he does not think that the idolatrous spouse will re-convert the believer to paganism.

In between 7:14 and 7:16 comes (obviously) 7:15, which is very important. In giving his rule that a believing partner should release an unbelieving partner if the latter wishes it, Paul adds, “in such cases the brother or the sister is not bound” (literally, “is not enslaved”). This most obviously means “is not bound to try to keep living with the partner who wants to leave.” It is highly probable in the minds of most commentators, including me, that “is not bound” means also

that the deserted partner, not having wanted a divorce, is *free to re-marry* if a non-believing spouse deserts him or her.

This is a modification of Jesus' absolute prohibition of remarriage after divorce. The circumstances of the mission to gentiles may have changed ethical rules slightly.

Still under the general heading of marriage, sex, and so on, 1 Corinthians 7 also reveals one of Paul's main concerns and one of his most important principles and the reason for it. He starts with the principle: "let each of you lead the life that the Lord has assigned, to which God called you. This is my rule in all the churches" (7:17).

We then learn that this means "do not change." Paul exemplifies the rule by shifting from marriage and divorce to circumcision and slavery. If someone was circumcised, he should remain circumcised; if uncircumcised, he should remain so (7:18–20). Slaves should remain slaves, the free should remain free (7:21–24). After further rules about sex and marriage, which we have already noted (7:25–28), he explains,

The appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away. (7:29–31)

In view of the rest of the chapter, this does not mean that husbands should neglect their wives and that property owners should give away their possessions. "As though not" probably means that marriage, mourning, rejoicing, and so on, do not matter, just as he wrote that "circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but obeying the commandments of God is everything" (7:19). That is, do not bother to try to change your state, whatever it is, whether circumcised, enslaved, married, or rich *because the time is short*. It is

a tribute to his knowledge of humanity that, despite his view that the world was passing away and that time was short, he knew that sexual desire could be so pressing that single people should marry, thus exempting them from the rule “do not change.”

Today the reader will regret the fact that Paul regarded slavery as a tolerable state in which to await the return of the Lord. But he probably could not imagine a world in which there was no slavery or, more precisely, could not imagine such a world prior to the return of the Lord. The distinction between slave and free was, in his view, overcome “in Christ” (1 Cor. 7:22f.; cf. 12:13; Gal. 3:28, both on the “body of Christ”), but this would not affect society in the short time remaining until the coming of the Lord. The principle “do not change” strongly reinforced his social conservatism, which sometimes seems at odds with his radical theology (all are one person in Christ Jesus).

1 Corinthians 5

We move now to 1 Corinthians 5, part of which also concerns sex. It opens with a passage that we noted above (pp. 268–69), in discussing Paul’s problems with the Corinthians. I repeat this passage in full because it was very important in his conflict with the Corinthians. It seems to have been a highly contentious issue, about which neither Paul nor the Corinthians wanted to give ground. He finally won his point, as we saw in the previous chapter.

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans [literally, gentiles]; for a man is living with his father’s wife. And you are arrogant! Should you not rather have mourned, so that he who has done this would have been removed from among you? For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present I have already pronounced judgment in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done such a thing. When you are assembled, and my spirit is present with the power of our Lord Jesus,

you are to hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

Several points in this extremely interesting passage require clarification.

1. Paul writes again, as he had on another sexual topic (1 Thess. 4:5), as if he were writing to other Jews: in 5:1 he contrasts his converts with gentiles (non-Jews). Jews in general thought that gentiles in general were sexually immoral, as we noted in discussing 1 Thess. 4:5, and as we shall see repeatedly. Paul often makes disparaging remarks about the sexual conduct of gentiles, which leads him temporarily to write as if the gentile Christians in Corinth were Jews. They should have accepted Jewish views of morality.
2. We may assume that “his father’s wife” in verse 1 was that man’s stepmother. Leviticus 18, which forbids incest and specifies which degrees of kinship prohibit sexual relations, distinguishes “uncovering the nakedness” of a man’s *mother* from “uncovering the nakedness” of his *father’s wife* (Lev. 18:6–8). The sexual laws of Leviticus are not far from Paul’s mind in 1 Corinthians, and thus he is probably following the distinction between “mother” and “father’s wife,” that is, stepmother.
3. “Mourning” (v. 2) would accompany expulsion, as in 2 Cor. 12:21.
4. Paul could be “present” “with the power of the Lord Jesus” (vv. 3–4) because of his especially close relationship with the Lord (above, pp. 261–63).
5. Paul assumes that a Christian who sins grievously, and who is expelled, will die (v. 5). It was standard in Judaism to think that premature death was punishment for unrepented sin.¹⁷
6. It was also standard in Judaism to think that there was no double

jeopardy: a person who suffered or died because of sin would thereby atone for the transgression and would not be further punished in the world to come.¹⁸ Thus Paul thought that the man's spirit would be saved in the day of the Lord (v. 5). This common view is also seen in 1 Cor. 11:27–32, where Paul criticizes the Corinthians who partake of the Lord's Supper in an "unworthy manner."

For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves. For this reason many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. (11:29–32)

That is, those who abuse the Lord's body by eating gluttonously and getting drunk (11:21) are punished by sickness and death, but having been punished, they will be saved.

7. The most interesting question is why the man did what he did and why the Corinthians were arrogant about it. Alternate translations for "arrogant" are "puffed up" or "putting on airs."¹⁹ Why were they proud of the man? The clue is given in verses 3 and 4, though the translations, in a most unusual display of unanimity, disguise it.²⁰ The question is to which phrase we should attach the words "in the name of the Lord Jesus." I shall first give the sequence of the phrases in Greek:

- a. I have already judged
- b. the man who did this

17. See E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 158–59, 172–74.

18. *Ibid.*, 168–72; 302; 304–5; 326–27; see also above on "Pharisaic Soteriology," pp. 42–49.

19. See *BDAG*, s.v. *physioō*.

20. Perhaps the problem is that the text absolutely requires explanation, and most translations do not include explanations.

- c. in the name of the Lord Jesus
- d. when you are assembled and my spirit is with you

The NRSV (following the RSV) connects (a) and (c), and puts (b) after (c). It then starts a new sentence with (d): “(a) I have judged (c) in the name of the Lord Jesus (b) the man who did this. (d) When you are assembled . . .” The NIV connects (a) and (b), begins a new sentence with (d), and puts (c) after (d): “(a) I have judged (b) the man. . . (d) When you are assembled (c) in the name of our Lord Jesus.” (So also the JB and the NEB.)

Because Greek manuscripts do not have punctuation, the translator must supply not only quotation marks (noted above), but also punctuation. Moreover, Greek does not depend on word order and the sequence of the parts of a sentence to the degree that English does. Therefore there can be only a weak grammatical argument against the two rearrangements noted above (a, c, b, d; a, b, d, c). It is worthwhile, however, to see how the sentence would run if we maintain the sequence of the phrases as Paul dictated them: a, b, c, d. This is the simplest construal of the Greek, and ignoring the simplest construal seems to me to be a mistake.

Following the sequence a, b, c, d, we have this: “I have already judged, as if I were with you, the man who did this in the name of the Lord Jesus. When you are assembled, and my spirit is with you . . .”²¹ This is not only the simplest translation, it also explains the man’s action and the Corinthians’ attitude. If the man transgressed not only Jewish but also gentile ethics (5:1), and if the Corinthians were proud

21. In favor of this translation, see Murphy-O’Connor, “I Corinthians, V, 3–5,” *Revue Biblique* 84 (1977): 239–45; George W. MacRae, “Why the Church Rejected Gnosticism,” *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition* (London: SCM, 1982), 1:126–33, here 128: “the text of 1 Cor. 5.3–5 must be read in its natural order, repressing as much as possible the reservations of modern translators.” MacRae’s explanation was that the man’s behavior was influenced by “a Gnostic or quasi-Gnostic scorn for material existence.” It seems to me much more likely that it came from the way the man understood Paul.

of him, we should assume that he had a *Christian* reason, or what he thought was a Christian reason. He did it “in the name of the Lord Jesus,” and the Corinthians were proud of how radically he obeyed the gospel. Now we must ask ourselves, how can one commit legal incest in the name of the Lord Jesus?

We cannot be sure precisely what Paul said about life in Christ that led to this result, but probably it was something like 2 Cor. 5:17: “If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” If there was a new creation, the old family relationships had passed away.

Consequently members of the body of Christ (it might be thought) were no longer governed by laws such as those of Leviticus 18. How could they be? They were new people! It would be unchristian to deny the radical newness of people who became part of the body of Christ and who belonged to him, rather than to the old world, which was passing away.

We also recall that Paul routinely urged his converts to live by the Spirit. Perhaps the man thought that the Spirit told him to live with his stepmother. It is even conceivable that he thought that this was included under “love your neighbor.”

I prefer the first explanation (those in Christ are a new creation), but we cannot be sure what the man’s reasoning was. Nevertheless, it was very probably based on his understanding of Christian theology. If this was one of the main points of conflict between Paul and his church, and if the man in question was the church member who finally repented and obeyed Paul (see 2 Cor. 2:5–7, above, pp. 267–69), we can understand why the problem was so difficult and why he resisted Paul so strongly. If he had merely wanted to live with his stepmother, and had no Christian theological point in his favor, he could simply have withdrawn from the church. Something kept the case alive within Paul’s fledgling community, and it seems to have

endured despite alpha Corinthians, 1 Corinthians, and Paul's painful visit, being finally resolved only by his harsh letter and Timothy's efforts (above, pp. 235–37; 269). The best explanation of the long struggle between Paul and the Corinthians is that there was one really difficult case, and that the man and several other members of the Christian community thought that he was *right*, though what he was doing was against both gentile and Jewish ethics. He was acting “in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

Paul, who had been brought up in accord with the strict rules of sexual ethics that seem to have been common in the Greek-speaking Diaspora (see immediately below), was horrified at the outcome of this sort of reasoning. I would say, however, that the incident shows how literally the Corinthians took his proclamation of a new existence in Christ and how creative they could be in applying his theology to cases that he had not thought of.

1 Corinthians 6:13-20

In 1 Cor. 6:13b–20 Paul takes up the *use of prostitutes*, and he opposes it completely.

The body is meant not for prostitution [*porneia*]²² but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. . . . Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute [*pornē*]? Never! Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, “The two shall be one flesh” [Gen. 2:24]. But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Shun prostitution! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the man who uses a prostitute (*porneuōn*)²³ sins against the body itself. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from

22. The NRSV has “fornication” here and also in verse 8. *Porneia* in classical Greek is usually “prostitution,” but (as noted above) Paul often uses the word to mean “sexual immorality” in general. I discuss the terms in detail below, pp. 363–65. Because of the immediate context, I shall translate *porneia* “prostitution” in 1 Cor. 6:13, 18.

God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

Paul here brings heavy artillery to bear: the first argument is based on the idea that Christians were part of the body of Christ. In this passage, being part of Christ should control behavior, and the argument about behavior is based on a theory of *union with Christ*. Some unions are inappropriate for a person who is already in union with Christ. This rules out the use of prostitutes.

Paul's view is similar to one of **Philo**'s discussions of prostitutes. Dealing with a passage in Deuteronomy that forbids money gained from prostitution to be used in buying temple sacrifices (see immediately below), Philo explains that "one would not care to admit into partnership with the priests the women whose very money is profane and regarded as base" (*Spec. Laws* 1.104). The logic is very similar. The word translated "partnership" is *koinōnia*, which may also be rendered "participation." We shall meet this word again when we consider 1 Corinthians 8 and 10.

Paul then puts forward a second argument, again a very strong theological point: the body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, and using a prostitute defiles the temple. This is probably based on Deut. 23:18 (LXX and ET; Hebrew 23:19), which prohibits bringing the money gained by prostitution into "the house of the Lord your God" in payment of a vow. It is then an easy step to ban from the temple anything having to do with prostitution. Paul adds that the body is the temple, and the second argument is complete: prostitution should not defile the human "temple," since the Spirit dwells there.

In my naive and innocent youth, I thought that Paul first conceived the notion of union with Christ and then considered other

23. "Man who uses a prostitute" (*porneuōn*) is translated "fornicator" in the NRSV; see the previous note and p. 365.

unions that were inappropriate to it and might damage it, and that, in canvassing unions, he thought of prostitution and so singled it out as being inappropriate for people who were united with Christ.

Having learned to distinguish rationale or argument from motive and source, I now think otherwise. It is much more probable that he first thought that the employment of a prostitute was wrong and then went in search of an argument to prove it. The argument, of course, is interesting, since it shows that he connected ethics with the idea of participation in Christ and being possessed by the Spirit, not with a supposed doctrine of forensic justification.²⁴ But I am now inclined to think that the argument about union with Christ and the temple of the Spirit is rationalization to support a point arrived at on another basis: he was a Diaspora Jew.

Judaism, one would have thought in advance, did not condemn prostitution. Although prostitutes were generally looked down on even by people who tolerated or even employed them (as they still are), the profession is accepted in the Bible, and the rabbis subsequently considered it legal.²⁵ Josephus, summarizing the Jewish law, wrote that the wages of a prostitute could not be used to purchase a sacrifice, which is his version of Deut. 23:18 (*Antiq.* 4.206).²⁶ It follows from this that he, like the Hebrew Bible, did not regard prostitution as completely illegal, though it was not precisely a noble profession.

In the Diaspora there was a more rigorous view than that of the Bible and the rabbis. We find it in Philo: According to *Spec. Laws* 3.51, a prostitute (*pornē*) is “a pest, a scourge, a plague-spot to the public,” and the law of Moses requires that she be stoned to death.

24. This will be a major topic when we discuss Galatians and Romans.

25. E.g., Judah ha-Nasi in *t. Temurah* 4:8.

26. See also *Antiq.* 4.245, where Josephus states that the biblical prohibition implies that a man may not marry a prostitute, since she could not present her nuptial sacrifices in the temple.

On Joseph 43 is even stronger: “Other nations are permitted after the fourteenth year to deal . . . with harlots [*pornai*] . . . but with us a courtesan [*hetaira*] is not even permitted to live.” A courtesan, *hetaira* in Greek, was a “mistress” or a “kept woman,” a large step above a common prostitute or harlot (*pornē*). Philo condemns not only prostitutes but also courtesans to death. Philo almost certainly based this on Deut. 23:17 (English and LXX; Hebrew 23:18), which in the LXX prohibits a daughter of Israel from being a prostitute, *pornē*. In the same verse, the LXX also prohibits sons of Israel from using prostitutes, although here the Hebrew text only prohibits both female and male Israelites from being *temple* prostitutes.²⁷

I think it likely that in the Diaspora, faced with *porneia*—sexual immorality—of all kinds, some Jews attempted to forbid prostitution within their own communities entirely — a step that was not required in Palestine, where the problem of gentile sexual ethics did not press so heavily and make Jews take this step to be distinctive. In this case, the LXX and Philo show slightly different but related efforts to ban prostitution. Philo understood the LXX’s prohibition to imply the death penalty, and then added that the same penalty applied to courtesans. This is one of the cases in which we cannot connect Paul’s view to Palestinian Judaism, though it fits Diaspora Judaism very well.

Returning to Paul, we now note that in 1 Cor. 6:15, 18 he uses the two key terms of the Greek translation of Deut. 23:17:

Deut. 23:17 LXX

There shall not be a prostitute (*pornē*) of the daughters of Israel, and there shall not be one who uses prostitutes (*porneuōn*) of the sons of Israel.

1 Cor. 6:15, 18

Whoever is united to a prostitute (*pornē*) becomes one body with her. But the man who uses a prostitute (*porneuōn*) sins against the body itself.

27. The Hebrew is *qedēshah* (a female temple prostitute) and *qadēsh* (a male temple prostitute).

Paul was remembering the same biblical text as Philo, the Greek translation of Deuteronomy (not the Hebrew original), and he, doubtless along with thousands and thousands of other Jewish readers of the Greek Bible, thought that the Jewish Scripture prohibits prostitution and the use of prostitutes.

In light of this, it is likely that the *reason* Paul thought that prostitution and the employment of prostitutes is wrong is that his Scripture, the Greek Bible, forbade Israelites to engage in either activity. In addressing his gentile converts, he came up with two novel *arguments* in favor of this view: the inappropriateness of joining a member of the body of Christ to a prostitute and of defiling the temple of the Spirit with prostitution. As is often the case, his specific ethical position depended on Greek-speaking Judaism.

The Corinthian Correspondence, Part 3: The Lord's Supper and Food Offered to Idols

The Lord's Supper: 1 Cor. 11:17-34

Above we briefly noted the rebuke that Paul administered to the Corinthians for the way they observed the Lord's Supper (or Eucharist): "each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk" (1 Cor. 11:21). Here I wish to look at the Lord's Supper a little more closely and to compare it to what Paul says about food offered to idols in 1 Corinthians 10. In the previous chapter, we discussed the Corinthians' problem with self-assertive, greedy behavior, which does not require any further comment. Here we shall begin by examining what Paul himself made of the Eucharist.

First we note that Paul indicates that the basic passage on Jesus' last meal in 1 Cor. 11:23-25 is a tradition "from the Lord" that he is

handing down (v. 23). His text is in fact very close to the passage in the first three Gospels. Matthew agrees very closely with Mark, and I shall print only Mark, Paul, and Luke. Underlining indicates some of the most noteworthy agreements between Paul and Luke.

Mark 14:22-25

While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said,

“Take; this is my body.”

Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. He said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

1 Cor. 11:23-26

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed

took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said,

“This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying,

“This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” ²⁶For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Luke 22:15-20

¹⁵He said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; ¹⁶for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.”

Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said,

“Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.”

It is not our purpose here to seek the earliest version of the “words of institution,” but I shall quickly run through three of the most obvious points of comparison and contrast.

1. There is a common core in Paul’s version and in all three synoptic Gospels: (a) a loaf of bread, identified as “my body”; (b) a cup, with a saying about “blood” and “covenant”; (c) a statement about the future. The Gospels attribute a saying to Jesus, who predicts drinking wine with the disciples again in the kingdom of God; Paul refers to the future in his own voice, writing that the supper proclaims “the Lord’s death until he comes.”
2. Luke has two cups, one before the loaf and one after; in the first, Jesus makes the future statement about drinking again when the kingdom comes, and in the second he calls the cup “the new covenant in my blood.”
3. Paul agrees with Luke against Mark (and Matthew) in a few particulars (underlined above): (a) In Luke and Paul, Jesus “gives thanks” before breaking the bread, while in Mark and Matthew, he “blesses” the bread. (b) After mentioning his body, Jesus says “for you.” (c) Paul and Luke both have “in remembrance of me,” though Paul has it twice and Luke only once. (d) As noted above, in Paul and Luke, the cup is “the new covenant in my blood” rather than “my blood of the covenant” as in Mark and Matthew.¹

It is noteworthy that even in this passage, which one would expect

1. As noted above (p. 280 n. 3), there are rather a lot of textual variants in the versions and manuscripts of Luke’s passage on the Lord’s Supper. They are probably caused by the fact that the scribes and translators tended to conform Luke to Matthew. I accept the Greek text as printed in the Nestle-Aland edition of the Greek New Testament. On the textual problems see Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 1387–388.

was carefully preserved by being recalled so often in Christian worship, there are variations and disagreements about precisely what Jesus said. We recall that there are also variations in the wording of “the Lord’s Prayer” in Matthew and Luke, and the same is true of the “Beatitudes” in Matthew and Luke (see chap. 9, n. 24). These are sayings of Jesus where one would expect precise memorization, but instead we find variation.

I wish to point out some relationships between the passage on the Lord’s Supper and others in 1 Corinthians. It is noteworthy that “this is my body” in 1 Cor. 11:24 is followed by Paul’s discussion of the “body of Christ” in chapter 12, which we discussed above (pp. 275–79). We have also seen the argument about “members of Christ” and prostitutes (1 Cor. 6:15, above, pp. 304–05). Moreover, the notions of the body of Christ and sharing one loaf of bread will also be important in the next passages to be discussed, 1 Corinthians 8 and 10, on food offered to idols.

It is probable that the present passage on the Lord’s Supper is basic to Paul’s development of the idea of the body of Christ. *Sharing* and *becoming part of* the body of Christ may be said to be implicit in the passage on the Lord’s Supper, because of the phrase “this is my body” (and, in Mark and Matthew, “this is my blood”). Since the Christians consume Jesus’ “body” (and, in Mark and Matthew, his blood), they are obviously sharing the body of Christ. This ancient ritual imitating Jesus’ final meal could easily turn into the formula that participants in the Supper constitute the body of Christ.

The main point of the passage on the Lord’s Supper, however, is not union with Christ, but rather on the meal as *memorial* (“do this in remembrance of me”) and *anticipatory* (“until I drink it new in the kingdom,” “until he comes”). That is, while the idea that Jesus’ followers share the “body of Christ” does appear in the passage on the Supper in 1 Cor. 11:23–26, it seems somewhat less important than “in

remembrance of me” and “until he comes,” the two statements that conclude the passage. The latter phrase clearly points to the climax of the present age, when the Lord returns.

Food Offered to Idols: 1 Corinthians 8, 10

We recall that in 1 Corinthians, Paul is responding to the Corinthians’ questions, some of which he had received by letter, some of which had been put to him by visitors (Chloe’s people, 1:11; Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, 16:17). From one of these sources he had learned that the Corinthians had inquired about eating meat from animals that had been sacrificed to idols (1 Cor. 8:1, 4). The RSV and the NRSV (not the NIV) put in quotation marks two phrases in 8:4: “Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that ‘no idol in the world really exists,’ and that ‘there is no God but one.’” This decision by the translators has the effect of attributing to the Corinthians a defense of eating food offered to idols: pagan gods do not really exist and there is actually only one God; eating food offered to nonentities is blameless.²

In light of other passages in 1 Corinthians, for example 5:1-5 and chapter 15, we expect the Corinthians to have arguments in favor of their view. They, or some of them, wanted to eat food offered to idols, and they defended this practice by theological arguments. This construal by the translators is probably correct at least in general (see n. 2 for variations): the Corinthians knew that Paul would not approve of what they wanted to do, and so in seeking his advice they put forward reasons and principles that he would have to respect. It was most likely he himself who had told them that there is only one God and that the gods of Corinth were nothing or worse than nothing.

2. The JB treats “We all have knowledge” in 8:1 as a quotation, but not the sentences in 8:4. The NEB treats all three clauses as quotations, which it emphasizes by adding “as you say.”

Why was food offered to idols an issue? We discussed above the very great social benefits of participating in pagan customs.³ Festivals were frequent, and they included parades, feasting, and sometimes games. Red meat was rare in most of the countries surrounding the Mediterranean Sea, and if it were not for religious festivals most people would seldom eat red meat. Since, however, there were a lot of festivals, and since in Greco-Roman sacrifices the gods got only a few bones (they were turned into smoke), most pagans had a decent supply of meat, even if most days they made do with barley, bread, cheese, and fish.⁴

If the sacrifices produced more meat than was consumed during the festival, the surplus was sold in the city market. Since the idols who were worshipped by sacrifice were nothing, did it not follow that Christians could eat sacrificial food bought in the city market and perhaps *even participate in the civic rites* and celebrations?

Once Paul names the question, we know what at least part of his response will be: as a Jew, he was against idolatry and thus against participating in pagan civic religion. Having been raised in a strict and pious household in the Diaspora, he had learned from earliest childhood to abhor idols and everything associated with them. The Corinthians' theological argument, excellent though it is, would not be able to reverse his deep-seated views—though he might moderate them somewhat. What is interesting is to see how he argued his case and whether or not he left any room for the Corinthians' quite natural desire to have fun and to feast.

Paul's First Reply to Food Offered to Idols: Love of Neighbor

Paul's first argument is that although idols are nothing, most people

3. See above, pp. 114–16; 195–201.

4. See, e.g., Robert Flacelière, *Daily Life in Greece at the Time of Pericles* (London: Phoenix, 1965), 168–73.

do not have this knowledge, and if they see Christians sharing in the sacrificial meal, or buying meat from the sacrifices in the market, those with weak consciences will be “defiled” (1 Cor. 8:7). That is, they will be encouraged to worship the idols as gods. Living with religious liberty may mislead others, who will thereby be destroyed (8:9–13).

In effect, Paul brings the prohibition of food tainted by idolatry under the heading “love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:18). It is noteworthy that he does not quote biblical law on the subject. The Ten Commandments forbid Israelites to “bow down to” idols or “worship them” (Exod. 20:5; Deut. 5:9). “Worship” means “sacrifice to.”⁵ We cannot know what Paul had told the Corinthians about the Jewish law, but he clearly did not think that all aspects of it governed his converts, and he did not cite it in this debate. Instead he chose another principle, one also emphasized in the Jewish law, but one that did not obviously set Jew off from gentile: concern for other people.

We shall consider this point more fully. Jews frequently distinguished what have come to be called “two tables” of the Mosaic law: the first table dealt with human relations with the deity (and with idols), the second with relations among humans. (See also p. 569.) As Philo put it, on the Sabbath, Jews throughout the world gathered in synagogues, where they learned their ancestral philosophy, which fell under two headings: “One of duty to God as shown by piety and holiness, one of duty to humans as shown by love of humanity and justice.”⁶ As the reader of the Gospels knows, the two passages in the Hebrew Bible that summarize these two aspects of the Jewish law are “love the Lord your God” (from one of the verses of the Shema, Deut. 6:5) and “love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:18,

5. Both the Hebrew (*ʾaʿavdēm*) and Greek (*latreusēs*) mean “serve,” which is the ancient word for what priests did: feed and care for the gods.

6. Philo, *Spec. Laws* 2.63; see further E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief* (London: SCM, 1992), 192–94.

to be supplemented by 19:34, “you shall love the alien as yourself”). Jesus cites these passages in Mark 12:28–34 and parallels, but both the principles and the summary passages were very well known—as, in fact, Luke’s parallel makes clear (10:25–28), for there the teacher who questions Jesus is the one who cites Deut. 6:5 and Lev. 19:18.⁷

Paul seems to have been *unwilling to cite the commandments on the “first table” as laws that governed his churches*; in fact, one of them, observance of the Sabbath, he felt ambiguous about (see Gal. 4:10; Rom. 14:5–6). He had no such feelings about idolatry, which is also covered by the “first table”—he was against it. Yet, as far as we know, he did not quote the commandments against idols and idolatry when directing his converts. Instead he came up with other arguments, many involving the Bible, including one that fits on the “second table,” love of others. Though he does not quote Lev. 19:18 in this passage, he elsewhere cites it as a summary of the law (Gal. 5:14; Rom. 13:8–10), and the principle “love your neighbor” guides his discussion of food offered to idols in 1 Corinthians 8: do not hurt the weak brother or sister by making him or her think that you believe in idols.

As we by now expect, one argument did not exhaust Paul’s repertoire, and he devoted another chapter to the topic, 1 Corinthians 10. There we find two additional arguments (his second reply and his third reply); a replay of the first and a puzzling conclusion.

Paul’s Second Reply to Food Offered to Idols: The Typology of 1 Corinthians 10

Paul’s second argument against allowing Christians to eat food offered to idols is 1 Cor. 10:1–14, which is a complicated application of his Scripture to the problem. I previously warned that Paul is

7. On the “two tables” and summaries of the law, see Sanders, *Practice and Belief*, 192–94, with the endnotes (p. 517); also pp. 231, 236, 257–60.

difficult to understand principally because he used first-century Jewish arguments. Here (in 1 Cor. 10:6–13) we find the first example of Jewish argumentation that will leave most readers puzzled. His main point will be clear, but the way in which he proves it will be opaque to most readers. But, fully to understand Paul, we must understand his arguments.

In technical terms, 1 Cor. 10:6–13 is a *typological* argument. Paul uses the word *type* in 10:6, 11 (the noun *typos* and the adverb *typikōs*), translated “warning” in the RSV and “example” in the NRSV and the NIV. These renderings are accurate enough, better in a translation than “type,” which would not be clear without explanation—which, however, I shall now offer.

We can understand Paul’s use of the word *type* if we think of “prototype” or “archetype.” These words in English refer to the original (thing, person, or action), of which something later is the copy or imitation. That is precisely what Paul means: something is described in the Bible that applies “now,” that is, in his own time; the original he calls the “type” in the sense of our “prototype.” “These things occurred as *types* [“warnings,” “examples”] *for us*, so that we might not desire evil as they did” (10:6).

We could paraphrase Paul’s point thus: the consequences that happened then will be repeated now if you (the Corinthians) repeat the actions of the Jews of Moses’ day.

What were the original actions (the prototypes) and what were their consequences? The history that Paul finds instructive is in Exodus and Numbers. In our passage, he reveals one of his main characteristics: he was an ancient Jewish expert in his Scripture (the Septuagint) who was especially expert in using the biblical text in argumentation. The modern reader is handicapped by not having memorized the text of the LXX and by not understanding the methods by which an ancient interpreter made the Bible relevant to his own

day and to the issue at hand. We shall consider 1 Cor. 10:1-14, therefore, in considerable detail, partly in order to show that it can be made comprehensible if one can follow in Paul's steps, but also to illustrate the fact that one does not have to follow the entire argument precisely in order to see the main points. It may help if first I give Paul's conclusion to this extremely complicated argument: *Have nothing whatever to do with idols. Long ago it proved fatal to many Israelites.*

We shall consider the passage line by line, first noting the details and then summarizing the argument as a whole.

Our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. (1 Cor. 10:1-4)

In these verses Paul again writes as if to Jews: "our ancestors" experienced the exodus from Egypt.⁸ The particulars that follow are from Exodus 13, 14, 16, 17 and Numbers 20, though Paul alters the biblical stories to make them fit the situation of the Corinthians more precisely. The cloud is from Exod. 13:21, "The Lord went in front of them in a pillar of cloud by day . . ." That they passed through the sea is from Exod. 14:22; the spiritual food is the manna of Exod. 16:4-15; the rock that yielded water is from Exod. 17:6 and Num. 20:2-12. These are the first elements of Paul's "type," which he will apply to the situation of the Corinthians.

There are, however, some important differences between these prototypical events as Paul describes them and the biblical story. (1) Exodus does not say that the Israelites were "baptized into Moses" in the cloud and the sea (1 Cor. 10:2). On the contrary, according to

8. On Paul's writing to his gentile converts as if they were Jews, see also pp. 219; 340.

Exod.14:21-22, a strong east wind “turned the sea into dry land” and “the Israelites went into the sea on dry ground.” (2) Exodus does not call the manna and the water “spiritual” food and drink; that is Paul’s interpretation (10:3-4). (3) According to Exodus and Numbers, the water-giving rock was stationary and did not follow the Israelites as it does in 1 Cor. 10:4.

The first two of these differences are quite easy to explain: Paul is already setting up an analogy with the Christians, who were *baptized* and who partook of the Lord’s Supper, which is *spiritual* food and drink. It is customary to explain the statement that the water followed the Israelites by appealing to other Jewish passages. In one passage in the Tosefta (a rabbinic text), the well followed Israel and finally settled in Jerusalem.⁹ That “the rock was Christ” (10:4) is Paul’s most obvious personal contribution to the interpretation of Exodus and Numbers. It is one of the earliest indications that Christians sometimes thought of Christ as “preexistent” (that is, existent prior to the birth of Jesus).

To this point, Paul has established some parallels between the Exodus and Christianity that, by the standards of first-century Jewish exegesis, justified applying various passages in the Bible to the Corinthians’ question about food offered to idols. The parallels are indicated by the words *baptism*, *spiritual food and drink*, and *the rock*. He now proceeds to the warning that is the point of the typology:

Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were “struck down in the wilderness” [Num. 14:16]. Now these things occurred as *types* for us, so that we might not “desire” evil as they “desired” [it] [Num. 11:4]. 7Do not become idolaters as some of them did; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to dance” [in Exod. 32:6].¹⁰

9. *i. Sukkah* 3:11.

10. The NRSV translates the last verb “play” in 1 Cor. 10:7 and “revel” in Exod. 32:6; the NIV has “indulge in pagan revelry” in Paul and “indulge in revelry” in Exodus; the RSV has “dance” in

That the Israelites were “struck down in the wilderness” (1 Cor. 10:5) is from Num. 14:16; the only difference is that Paul uses a passive rather than an active form of the verb “strike down.”

In 10:6, I have translated the last clause literally, “so that we would not ‘desire’ evil as they ‘desired’ [it]” (the NRSV has “not desire evil as they did”). Paul’s repetition of “desire” is from Num. 11:4, “they desired with desire,” which is Hebrew idiom for “they strongly desired.” The LXX also uses “desire” twice: “they desired desire.” Here Paul alters the LXX slightly and repeats the word that is emphasized in a second clause, “do not desire as they desired.” He also worked in the word *evil*: “do not desire evil as they desired [it].”

The quotation about sitting down and rising up to dance (10:7) is from Exod. 32:6. It is part of the story of the golden calf: in worshipping the calf, Aaron sacrificed animals, and the people feasted and then “danced” (or, as translators sometimes render the verb, “played” or “reveled”; see n. 10). Whatever the Israelites did in the wilderness, it was part of their worship of the golden calf.

We can now see what Paul’s argument is: (a) The story of the Israelite generation that escaped from Egypt is a “type” (archetype or prototype) for “us”: we are like the wilderness generation. They escaped from Egypt, were baptized, ate spiritual food, and drank spiritual drink. This makes their situation analogous to “ours” (Paul’s own day), since followers of Christ are baptized and partake of spiritual food and drink.

(b) But they *committed idolatry*, specifically by *feasting and dancing* after sacrifices to an idol, and they *were destroyed*. Since this was

Paul and “play” in Exodus. The verb in 32:6 is used in Gen. 26:8 and 39:14, 17 to refer to sexual activity, and possibly this is why English translators sometimes use “revel” or “indulge in revelry.” The Greek verb *paizein*, which appears in the LXX of Exod. 32:6 and in 1 Cor. 10:7, means literally “act like a child,” and therefore “play,” but it also refers especially to dancing. Paul used the word because he was quoting, and we cannot know what he thought it meant; for our purposes, all that matters is that he quoted it.

written “for us,” and since the wilderness generation is our prototype, we are to infer that we too, despite being baptized and being partakers of spiritual food and drink, will *be destroyed* if we commit *idolatry*, specifically by *eating and drinking* what has been offered to an idol.

Once we have understood the use of the word *type*, have looked up all the passages, have discovered the relationship between the stories in Exodus and in Numbers (they refer to the wilderness generation), and have reconstructed the argument, it all seems straightforward and clear (I hope).

We should, however, doubt that the Corinthians followed it all. Paul does not actually mention the golden calf in his typology, though he does precede his reference to eating, drinking, and dancing with the admonition, “Do not become idolaters as some of them did” (1 Cor. 10:7). If the Corinthians had wanted to figure out the typology, they would have had to find scrolls of the Bible and study them quite carefully, without the aid of cross-references and concordances. But even when they found the passages, and saw that Exod. 32:6 refers to worshipping an idol, they might still have had problems, since the passage in Numbers is not related to idolatry.

In Numbers, the “desire” that the Israelites had (Num. 11:4; 1 Cor. 10:6) was for meat, not idolatry, and it was satisfied by the quails, not by sacrifice (Num. 11:31). In Numbers, God was angry with the people for grumbling about their food; they got tired of manna (see 11:1–9). God vented his anger by killing some of the people while they still had the meat of the quails between their teeth (11:33). In Numbers 14, the Israelites complain again of their hard lot and wish to return to Egypt (14:1–4). This leads God to threaten further destruction (14:11–12). Moses, to gain God’s mercy and prevent further slaughter of the Israelites, tells God that killing all the people who have shown their lack of faith in him would, in effect,

damage God's reputation. Other people will say that he (God) "struck down" his people "in the desert" because he was unable to give them a new land (Num. 14:15-16). Paul quotes "struck down" and "in the desert" in 1 Cor. 10:5. God did forgive the people, but he nevertheless decided that they would not enter the land of Canaan (14:20-24).

The story in Numbers has nothing to do with idolatry, and "struck down" does not refer to divine punishment for worshipping idols.

So Paul has combined two stories—from Exodus, the story of the golden calf, and, from Numbers, the story of the people's grumbling, which led God to kill some of them and frustrate the rest. Paul applies both stories to the worship of idols. This might have caused the beginning students of the Bible in Corinth to scratch their heads and furrow their brows.

They were, of course, in no doubt as to what Paul wanted. As usual, Paul's main point is explicitly stated: "Do not become idolaters as some of them did" (1 Cor. 10:7) is perfectly clear, and this makes the quotation about eating, drinking, and dancing clear at least in general. Moreover, in 10:14 Paul urges them to "flee from the worship of idols."

This is what they certainly understood clearly: Paul quoted sacred passages and opposed idolatry. Paul's conclusions, with very few exceptions, are crystal clear, though his arguments in favor of the conclusions are often difficult and convoluted.

Thus far, these verses in 1 Corinthians 10 seem to lead to the conclusion that Paul was completely opposed to the Corinthians' eating food from animals that had been sacrificed to idols. This was, after all, the opening question (1 Cor. 8:1, 4), and his typology means that they should have nothing to do with food offered to idols. But further twists and turns lie ahead.

The first is that in between the two admonitions against idolatry (10:7 and 10:14) Paul introduces further topics. After urging the

Corinthians not to become idolaters and quoting Exodus 32:6 (1 Cor. 10:7), he adds,

We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and “twenty-three thousand” [Num. 25:9] fell in a single day. We must not put the Lord¹¹ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by “serpents” [Num. 21:5f.]. And do not “grumble” [Num. 16:41] as some of them did, and were destroyed by the “destroyer” [Wis. Sol. 18:25]. These things happened to them as *types*, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come.

These additions to Paul’s admonitions are easily explained if one thinks of his years as a student of the Bible. Having used Numbers in his typology against idolatry, he decides to take some other points from Numbers, apparently turning the scroll containing Numbers backward in his mind: he begins with Numbers 25, proceeds to Numbers 21 and concludes with Numbers 16.

In 1 Cor. 10:8, he refers to Num. 25:1-9, the story of Israelites who had sexual relations with Moabite women, which led to idolatry, which the Lord punished by sending a plague that killed twenty-four thousand (as our texts of Num. 25:9 now read; Paul remembered the number as twenty-three thousand). This form of sexual activity did not really apply to the Corinthians, whom Paul had probably not forbidden to have intercourse with Moabites, nor with any other nationality in particular, but it is the occasion of a nice reminder about sexual behavior. He probably leapt to Numbers 25 because of the reference to idolatry in 25:2, though he does not quote this verse.

In 10:9 he refers to Num. 21:5-6: “The people spoke against God and against Moses . . . then the Lord sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died.”

11. The NRSV has “Christ,” but the RSV, the NIV, and the JB have “the Lord.” Both have good support in the manuscripts, but ordinarily the manuscripts supporting “the Lord” are preferred. “Christ” may, however, be the more difficult and thus the more likely reading.

First Corinthians 10:9 is fairly straightforward: Paul interprets “speak against” in Numbers 21:5 as “put to the test” or “challenge,” and “God and Moses” as “the Lord” (“Lord” might refer either to God or to Christ in Paul’s usage). Paul’s “destroyed by serpents” is a summary of Num. 21:6.

First Corinthians 10:10 is more difficult: “Do not grumble as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer.” There are a lot of references to “grumbling” or “complaining” in Numbers: 11:1; 14:2, 26–27, 29; 16:41; 17:5, 10.¹² (“Grumbling” is better than the NRSV’s “complaining,” because grumbling, like the Greek *gogyzō*, is onomatopoeic.) Of the various possibilities, Paul apparently has in mind Num. 16:41–50. According to this story, the people grumbled against Moses and Aaron, who took refuge in the “tent of meeting” (or of “testimony”). God intended to destroy the crowd, and so he told Moses and Aaron to separate themselves for their own protection. Moses, however, told Aaron to take his censer, put coals and incense on it, and carry it into the crowd to protect them, “for wrath has gone out from the Lord; the plague has begun” (v. 46). Aaron did as he was told. “He stood between the dead and the living; and the plague was stopped. Those who died by the plague were fourteen thousand seven hundred . . .” (v. 48–49).

The reason for settling on this story as the one that Paul had in mind is that it is also retold in the *Wisdom of Solomon*,¹³ at 18:20–25, where the conclusion is this: “To these [Aaron’s high priestly ornaments] the destroyer yielded.” “The destroyer” in *Wisdom of Solomon* 18:25 is in Greek *olothreuōn*; “the destroyer” in 1 Cor. 10:10

12. I cite the chapter and verse numbers in Numbers 16 and 17 according to the Greek and English; the Hebrew numeration is different.

13. The famous Israelite king did not write the *Wisdom of Solomon*, which is a work composed by an unknown Greek-speaking Jew, probably in Alexandria, Egypt. The date is probably pre-Pauline, perhaps late first century BCE. It is often printed in English Bibles as part of the “apocryphal” or “deuterocanonical” literature.

is *olethreutēs*, which is cognate (it is a noun rather than a substantive participle). That is, Paul apparently has in mind Num. 16:41–50 as it was retold in Jewish synagogues.¹⁴

General admonitions, some making use of the word *testing* from 1 Cor. 10:9, conclude this section (vv. 12–13). The reader who wants Paul to discuss his topic, food offered to idols, may be a little put off by the digression in 10:8–13, which is a series of comments about various transgressions, based on Numbers 25, 21, 16. Moreover, the points were hard to understand in detail by readers who had not memorized the text of Numbers in Greek (as they still are by those who do not have a concordance to the LXX). Paul, this section reminds us, often wrote at his own level (or sometimes, as in Galatians, at the level of his opponents), not necessarily that of his readers. (Think of doctors or lawyers communicating with one another in medical or legal language, tossing in all the Greek and Latin words and phrases that they know.)

While he was dictating 1 Corinthians, he did not interrupt himself, find his scrolls of Exodus and Numbers, study the passages, and then write up his comments after reacquainting himself with the text. He switches back and forth between Exodus and Numbers; he sometimes does not quote precisely; he uses two non-biblical traditions (the rock

14. On the close relationship between Paul and the Wisdom of Solomon, see also below, pp. 352–55. Whether or not Paul had at some time read the Wisdom of Solomon was once widely discussed. The question cannot be decisively settled. It would not surprise me to learn that he had read it, but there is an obvious alternative: the Wisdom of Solomon contains a lot of synagogal material, and synagogue homilies floated around the Mediterranean—including the synagogue or synagogues that Paul knew in his childhood and youth. In the present work, I assume the existence of common homiletical traditions in the Greek-speaking Diaspora. I attribute the parallels between Paul and the Wisdom of Solomon to such traditions, especially since this makes the best sense of some of the material in Paul that is “synagogal” but that does not explicitly agree with the Wisdom of Solomon (e.g., Rom. 1–2, below, pp. 622–27). From my point of view, however, both could be true: Paul could have used both common synagogal material and the Wisdom of Solomon. On the question of Paul and the Wisdom of Solomon, see the thorough study by Manfred Brauch, “The Problem of the Dual Pauline Eschatology in Light of the Eschatology of the Wisdom of Solomon,” PhD diss., McMaster University (Ontario), 1972.

moved, 10:4; “the destroyer,” 10:10); and he did not pay attention to the context of Numbers (where the problem was not idolatry). The last point, ignoring the larger context, is, to be sure, typical of a lot of ancient exegesis, but it adds to the overall impression that he wrote this passage without restudying the text closely.

In the mind of the ancient reader, the Bible was composed of words, phrases, and sentences that could be quoted and combined as the present argument required (not necessarily according to their original meaning). When this kind of biblical interpretation is granted, we must be impressed with Paul’s ability to recall words and phrases and to combine passages.

We cannot know whether or not some of this material was prepared in advance, either by someone whom Paul had heard in a synagogue or by himself on some earlier occasion. My guess is that he could do this sort of thing with any part of the Bible whenever he wished. I am not arguing against the *possibility* that he had previously studied and now remembered these exegetical steps; my general view of his knowledge of the Bible is that he had memorized the text¹⁵ and was capable of creativity on the spot and that we are not required to posit preparation every time we find him employing clever exegesis. Any given instance of exegetical display might be either memory or extemporaneous brilliance.

To repeat: although the Corinthians would have had a hard time figuring out precisely what he was doing, they knew that he was deriving points from an ancient sacred text, and their confusion may have been tempered by appreciation of his scholarly ability.

15. Above, pp. 72–76.

Paul's Third Reply to Food Offered to Idols:
Union and Participation

Paul returns to idolatry in 10:14, quoted above, “flee from the worship of idols.” Still thinking of ways to oppose eating meat that had been sacrificed in a pagan temple, he now employs an extremely interesting argument, and one that is much easier to comprehend than the typology. The key words in 10:16–22 are “participation” (which can also be translated “partnership” or “sharing”) and “participants” (or “partners”). The Greek words are *koinōnia*, “participation,” 10:16 (twice); and *koinōnoi*, “participants,” 10:18, 20. The word *one* also plays a role. I shall underline these words in the following quotation. I shall also indicate which passages in Scripture he is quoting.

The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. Consider the people of Israel according to the flesh; are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? What do I imply then? That food sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice, they “sacrifice to demons and not to God” [Deut. 32:17]. I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the “table of the Lord” [Mal. 1:7, 12] and the “table of demons” [Isa. 65:11]. Or are we “provoking” the Lord “to jealousy” [Deut. 32:21]? Are we stronger than he? (1 Cor. 10:16–22).¹⁶

We begin with comments on the four quotations from Paul's Scripture that appear in this third argument.

16. One of the generic weaknesses of modern translations of the New Testament, and also of at least some recent editions of the Greek text, is that the reader cannot see many of the instances in which the New Testament quotes the Old Testament. For the benefit of beginning scholars and advanced students, I should say that older editions of the Nestle Greek text, such as the twenty-third edition of 1957, are much more helpful.

(1) We recall that the Corinthians had defended their actions by reminding Paul that pagan deities were not really gods. Paul replies that “they sacrifice to demons and not to God” (1 Cor. 10:20), which is in almost precise agreement with Deut. 32:17; the form of the verb is slightly different.

(2, 3) In 1 Cor. 10:21, he turns to Malachi and Isaiah to contrast the “table of the Lord” (Mal. 1:7,12) and “the table of demons” (Isa. 65:11). The verses in Malachi deal with the “pollution” or “defilement” of the altar (“the table of the Lord”) by sacrificing maimed animals. Here the subject is not idolatry. That, rather, is found in the quotation from Isa. 65:11; the full verse is this (I translate the LXX): “You have left me, forgetting my holy mountain, preparing *a table for a demon*, and filling up the drink [offering] to Fortune.”

(4) Finally, in 1 Cor. 10:22 Paul alludes to Deut. 32:21, from which he quotes only the key words: “provoking to jealousy.” The full text of Deut. 32:21 (LXX) reads “they have provoked me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have exasperated me with their idols.” In this case, Paul quotes a text that denounces idols but does not include the word *idol* in the quotation. He is clearly writing this at the level of Jewish experts, who would have known that Deut. 32:21 said that idols provoked and exasperated God.

We may consider the most obvious example of Jewish experts, the early rabbis. The reader of rabbinic literature soon learns that, when they argue, the rabbis do not necessarily quote the *specific words* that prove their point. They often indicate the passage by giving its first words or some of its key words, expecting their colleagues to supply the rest from memory and to see the force of the proof text. This is approximately what Paul does. He does not necessarily quote the first words of the passage he has in mind, but he quotes words that identify it (for those who have memorized the Bible). Like the rabbis, he may or may not quote all the words that are relevant to his argument.¹⁷

Paul's head was teeming with quotations from the Bible denouncing idolatry. Although we must conclude that he did not wish to cite the Ten Commandments on the subject (since he did not do so), he could certainly work in a lot of other passages, and here he uses four. Once he decided to say that the pagan gods were "demons," and quoted Deut. 32:17 to prove the point, he naturally jumped to "table for a demon" in Isa. 65:11. This, in turn, suggested Malachi's "table of the Lord" as a contrast (even though the passage does not refer to idolatry). For his concluding admonition he returned to "idols" and quoted Deut. 32:21, though he did not include the actual reference to idolatry in his quotation.

It is, again, an impressive performance, though like some of his other exegetical arguments it may have bewildered the Corinthians. What is the point of teaching that the gods worshipped in Corinth are not gods and in fact are nothing—which the Corinthians had accepted—if one is going to turn around and say that they are demons, and that their tables must be avoided as if they were gods? But Paul, on this point Jewish to the core, abhorred idolatry and all its trappings, and so he went in search of arguments against it.

We must say that these quotations and the argument based on them, if considered in detail, would have been incomprehensible to his Corinthian converts. Which of his gentile readers would know or be able to find "table" in Malachi and Isaiah, or "provoke to jealousy," referring to idolatry, in Deuteronomy? Nevertheless, I observe once again, they could probably understand the main point,

17. In referring to the rabbis, I do not mean to imply that Paul was a rabbi (or a Palestinian Pharisee; the rabbis were the main successors of the pre-70 Palestinian Pharisees). On the contrary, I think that that is not the correct understanding of his learning and argumentative techniques (see above, pp. 32-42). A lot of first-century Jews studied the Bible very carefully and could quote it or paraphrase it freely. The other first-century Jews about whom we know the most, thanks to the literature that survives, are Philo and Josephus. Neither is properly called a rabbi; both were extremely learned in the written law. The partial parallel between Paul and the rabbis in the quotation of Scripture is general, not specific; it would apply to anyone who carried the text around in his head.

that in Paul's view the idols were "demons" and that they should avoid their "tables" (food from animals sacrificed on their altars).

It takes a modest degree of scholarship for a modern reader to look up the passages and unravel Paul's arguments: to find the golden calf prior to Exod. 32:6, to identify the "spiritual food" as manna, to find the connection between sex and idolatry in Numbers 25, and to see that God was "provoked to jealousy" by idolatry in Deut. 32:21, since today we have a lot of reference books. In Paul's day, of course, this would have been fantastically difficult for those who had not studied the Bible from childhood up.

Even if Paul had taught his converts to study the Bible, and even if the church had bought the twenty-two or so scrolls, the task of turning through them all, looking for two-word or three-word phrases, would have taken more time than they could give to it. This is what I mean by "writing at his own level." He would have understood another Jew who argued in this way, and a lot of other Jews would have understood him, being able to supply the needed words when he did not quote them. And, as I have emphasized several times, the gentiles who read 1 Corinthians would have understood Paul's overall views and conclusions. The reader of this book can form a perfectly good idea of what the Corinthians understood by simply reading the text of 1 Corinthians 10 carefully, ignoring the several pages that I have devoted to explaining Paul's scriptural argumentation.

The biblical quotations and allusions in 1 Cor. 10:14-22 are interesting and important if we are to understand the sort of man Paul was, the way he thought, and the way he sometimes proved points. But his larger argument about *participation* and *unity* is (in my judgment) more interesting and more important, though it takes less space to consider. Thus, after our comments on the four quotations in 1 Cor. 10:20-22 and the digression on how the Corinthians could or

could not have understood his arguments, we turn to the main point of the third argument.

In this argument (1 Cor. 10:16-22) Paul makes a contrasting analogy between the Lord's Supper and pagan worship. As we noted above, the phrase "this is my body" in the passage on the Lord's Supper (11:24) is obviously capable of leading to Paul's development of the theme of *union* with Christ, and this is a development that we see in 1 Cor. 10:14-22 and other passages. In the present case, he argues that those who have been *united* with Christ through the *one* loaf, and who have *participated* in the blood of Christ (10:16-17), must not unite themselves with a "demon" by *participating* in an idol's table. The argument is very reminiscent of 1 Cor. 6:15, where Paul points out that a "member" of the body of Christ must not become united with a prostitute.

What we see in these passages (on prostitution and idolatry) is that Paul was developing an appreciation for the power of the argument that Christians are *one person* with Christ and *participate* in him through *baptism* and the *Lord's Supper*. These two Christian rites were taking on a "mystical" or "sacramental" meaning. (On mysticism see above, 264-65; below, pp. 611-14.) Union with Christ in baptism appears in 1 Cor. 12:13 ("we were all baptized into *one* body"), while union with Christ through the Lord's Supper forms the argument of the present passage (10:16-22).

Well, the reader thinks again, that settles that, any connection with idolatry is absolutely out, since it ruptures the union with Christ. But Paul presses on. The RSV, the NRSV, and the NIV put parts of the next verse, 10:23, in quotation marks, suggesting that Paul is quoting the Corinthians' arguments. This again seems to me to be the best understanding of the passage.

Paul's Fourth Reply to Food Offered to Idols: Love of Neighbor (Again)

“All things are lawful,” but not all things are beneficial. “All things are lawful,” but not all things build up. Do not seek your own advantage, but that of the other. (10:23–24)

This is a reprise of the argument of 1 Corinthians 8: you may hurt your brother who sees you participating in idolatry and its fruits.

A Surprising Concession

Then, quite unexpectedly, Paul proposes that his converts can “eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience” (10:25). His argument is that “the earth and its fullness are the Lord’s” (10:26), which is a quotation of Ps. 24:1 (LXX 23:1).¹⁸ If God made it, how can it be forbidden?

Next he gives two rules for what to do when invited to a meal by an unbeliever: Eat without asking the source of the food (10:27); but, if someone says that the meat is from the sacrifices, “do not eat it, out of consideration for the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience—I mean the other’s conscience, not your own” (10:28–29a). This goes back to the argument of chapter 8 and 10:23f.: do not hurt someone else by appearing to condone idolatry. This time, however, he is concerned with the unbeliever rather than with a “weak” convert.

He immediately seems to contradict his own argument: “Why should my liberty be subject to the judgment of someone else’s conscience? If I partake with thankfulness, why should I be denounced because of that for which I give thanks?” (10:29b–30). This seems to say that other people’s perceptions of what a believer is

18. Cf. Ps. 50:12 (LXX 49:12), “the inhabitable world [*oikoumenē*] is mine, and its fullness.”

doing when he or she eats meat offered in sacrifice *do not matter*, just the reverse of chapter 8; 10:23f.; 10:28–29a.

Finally, he admonishes the Corinthians to do whatever they do “for the glory of God” (10:31), which is probably the contrary of eating for one’s own pleasure and benefit, especially in light of 10:32—11:1:

Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, *not seeking my own advantage, but that of many*, so that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

The last verse, “imitate me,” harks back to 8:13, “if food is a cause of my brother’s falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall.”

Most of the problems raised by these apparently contradictory final statements are solved if we posit different settings for the diverse pieces of advice in chapter 10:

- First possible setting: Do not dine at an idol’s table by actually *attending the sacrifice and eating in the temple precincts*. This view most clearly governs 10:16–22, on sharing the table and cup of demons. Paul probably had this setting in mind in 10:1–13 as well, especially since there he was thinking of the story of the golden calf (among other passages).
- Second possible setting: When you *shop in the market*, buy anything you wish; do not ask about the source of the meat (10:25–26).
- Third possible setting: When *dining with a pagan friend*, do not ask, but refrain from the meat if your host tells you that it is from a sacrificed animal. Do this for his sake, not yours (10:27–29a).

The rule of verse 32 (“give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to

the church of God”) expands the list of people whom one should not confuse or offend. Paul seems to mean this: Let your conscience be governed not just by your pagan host, but also by anyone else who might misunderstand, such as Jews and members of the church.

This leaves unresolved the contradiction of 10:29b-30—why should someone else’s conscience matter? I have not discovered any completely satisfactory explanation of these sentences. Perhaps the best understanding is that here Paul objects to being fettered by someone whose conscience is *excessively* scrupulous. If the believer, when eating meat, *gives thanks* to the one God, thereby proving that he or she does not really believe in the idol, a very picky person should not criticize him or her for eating. In any case, Paul embeds in his instructions to take care of other people’s consciences an objection: they should not destroy the freedom of a Christian who is properly thankful when eating.¹⁹

As we saw when discussing paganism, at their most extreme, Paul’s views about food and idols would subject his converts to serious social and probably also psychological difficulties. We should recall the general problem: he was converting gentiles to belief in the God of Israel, and in his Son, without, however, giving them membership in the nearby Jewish communities. Thus in terms of ancient society they were *nothing*, neither Jew nor pagan (note the threefold division above: Jew, Greek, church of God). His converts ran the risk of being an isolated, odd little sect, giving up the pleasures and benefits of civic culture and worship without gaining the compensation of Jewish community life. When it was a question of actually attending a pagan sacrifice, Paul seems willing to draw a hard line: you cannot do it if you partake of the Lord’s Supper.

But on other matters he was willing to meet them partway. As we

19. It is often suggested that this statement of freedom is an abstract principle that had to be modified in the presence of people who might be offended.

expected in advance, he “got” their point of view and made some concessions to it. They could buy meat in the market and eat it, and they could dine with friends who were not Christian if their host did not rub their face in the fact that the food had an idolatrous origin.

Thus Paul did not insist that his converts be a completely segregated sect. They could occasionally eat red meat, and they could socialize outside the small Christian circle. He does not mention parades and games, two of the other main aspects of pagan festivals, but presumably his converts could participate. Similarly he says nothing at all about attending events at which there was a token gesture to the gods, such as plays, meetings of the city council, and gatherings of the populace. Jews generally accepted these aspects of the pagan world without protest (though, I assume, without approval either),²⁰ and so they did not alarm Paul in the way that attending pagan temples did.

On the whole, I am impressed by the degree to which Paul listened to his converts. In some ways he was fanatical, but he could also relax a little and allow for the human comforts that his church members desired—or at least some of them. It doubtless helped a lot that the Corinthians knew how to argue and that they had mastered some of his own theological principles. One can almost see him musing at the end of chapter 10: “They are right, idols are nothing. There are some circumstances in which eating meat may be okay. I can tell them to imitate me, but I myself can be quite flexible if the needs of my mission require it. Moreover, can they always be looking over their shoulders, worrying about what wrong conclusions someone else draws? As long as in their hearts they thank the one God of Israel for his bounty, why should they not eat? After all, who created the world and declared it good?”

20. See Sanders, “Jewish Association with Gentiles and Galatians 2:11-14,” in *The Conversation Continues*, ed. Robert Fortna and Beverly Gaventa (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 170–88.

The Corinthian Correspondence, Part 4: Vice Lists and Homosexual Activity

For reasons that I shall explain below, I wish to treat homosexual practices more fully than their small role in Paul's letters would lead readers of the letters to expect. His two references to homosexual acts both appear in "vice lists"—lists of a wide range of sins—and these themselves require considerable explanation. Thus I shall dedicate a full chapter (plus appendix I) to these two topics.

Vice Lists

We shall consider in some detail the three vice lists in 1 Corinthians 5 and 6 and the lists in Romans 1 and Galatians 5.¹ All bear the strong mark of Diaspora Jewish criticism of gentiles, which focused on two points: idolatry and sexual immorality. The general view of Diaspora

1. See also 2 Cor. 12:20–21 (quarreling, jealousy, anger, selfishness, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder); Rom. 13:13 (reveling and drunkenness, debauchery and licentiousness, quarreling and jealousy).

Jews was that gentiles were guilty on both counts, and that they thereby started on a path that resulted in more and more vices. In the following passages, I italicize and put in parentheses the Greek words for sexual transgression, and I underline references to idolatry in order to reveal the prominence of these two categories in Paul's vice lists. I shall also give the Greek for a few other terms that will become important in the later discussion.

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral persons [*pornoi*]—not at all meaning the immoral [*pornoi*] of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, since you would then need to go out of the world. (1 Cor. 5:9-10)

[Do not] associate with anyone who bears the name of brother or sister who is sexually immoral [*pornos*] or greedy, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber. Do not even eat with such a one. . . . God will judge those outside. "Drive out the wicked person from among you" [Deut. 17:7]. (1 Cor. 5:11, 13)

Do not be deceived! Sexually immoral people [*pornoi*], idolaters, adulterers [*moichoi*], passive or "soft" males [*malakoi*], sodomites [*arsenokoitai*], thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Cor. 6:9-10. In the NRSV and the NIV, the Greek words I have translated "passive or 'soft' males" are translated "male prostitutes.")

Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality [*porneia*], impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. . . . [T]hose who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Gal. 5:19-21)

[Gentiles] exchanged [*metallassō*] the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator . . . Their women exchanged natural intercourse [*metēllaxan tēn physikēn chrēsin*] for unnatural [*para physin*], and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women [*tēn physikēn chrēsin*], were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men

[*arsenes en arsesin*]. . . . They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. (Rom. 1:25–31)

Before focusing on Paul's views about sex as they are revealed in these passages, we should briefly consider the nature and function of such lists. Lists of either *virtues* or *vices* or both occur in a fairly broad range of Greco-Roman literature, especially Stoic literature. There are also several examples in Greek-speaking Jewish literature.² Vice lists are more frequent than virtue lists, and, where both occur together, the list of vices is usually longer than that of virtues. This tendency can be seen in Galatians: in Gal. 5:22–23 there are nine virtues (not quoted above), while in 5:19–21 there are fifteen vices. Some authors organized their lists under clear headings, such as “self-restraint” or “lack of restraint.” Other lists seem to be more or less random, except that Jewish lists feature idolatry and sexual immorality. I shall give some examples from Jewish sources below.

Paul's lists, where the order is random and idolatry and sexual immorality are prominent, are in accord with other lists in the literature of Greek-speaking Judaism. The vice lists constitute an especially clear illustration of the fact that Paul was “at home” in the Diaspora. In the synagogue in Tarsus, or in any other synagogue in Asia Minor, he would have heard denunciations of gentile idolatry and sexual immorality.

One of the most important observations about Paul's lists of vices is that they more-or-less equate all the vices and condemn the guilty in absolute terms. According to 1 Cor. 5:11–13, the church should expel

2. There is an excellent summary by John Fitzgerald in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:857–59 (“Virtue/Vice Lists”). For a few examples from non-Jewish literature, see Abraham Malherbe, *Moral Exhortation: A Greco-Roman Sourcebook* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 138–41.

the greedy, revilers, and drunkards, as well as the sexually immoral and idolaters, to be judged (and doubtless punished) by God. First Corinthians 6:10 and Gal. 5:21 both state that the guilty will not “inherit the kingdom of God,” and the guilty include revilers (1 Cor. 6:9), those who foment strife, the jealous, the quarrelsome, and other objectionable but usually not punishable people whose errors are those of *speech* (Gal. 5:19-21). “Fomenting strife” by talking can do a lot of damage, but it is socially difficult to outlaw, and being eternally banned from the kingdom of God is a remarkably severe punishment.

Homiletically, vice lists gain rhetorical force partly by length and partly by the equation of relatively minor sins with major ones. It might be quite useful for a preacher to gain the audience’s support by condemning major sins (such as adultery and greed), but then to add that there are lots of sins—such as gluttony, abuse of alcohol, quarreling, and jealousy—which are practiced by some of the people in the pews, and that these count as sins too. The listeners’ approval of the condemnation of major sins is then transferred to the condemnation of lesser sins, and all can feel that they have been suitably rebuked for their faults. This has a healthily purgative effect.

It does not, however, make serious theological sense to think that all cases of jealousy, dissension, or greed are as bad as adultery or murder. Jealousy and greed, to be sure, can lead to enormous crimes, such as killing one’s spouse and robbing shareholders. But there are also a lot of petty cases of jealousy and greed, and the systematic ethicist would not want to lump together all of the possible examples of all of the vices on the list and assign the same penalty to them.

Paul, however, was not writing systematic ethics, but rather employing a rhetorical homiletical device. He heaped up faults and then condemned them all equally. When he had to deal with a *specific, individual* transgression, he responded quite differently. We have to look no further than the beginning of 1 Corinthians 5, where he

discusses the case of a man who was living with his stepmother, which counted as incest in both the Jewish and gentile worlds. This man, Paul proposed, should be expelled from the church; thus far Paul's treatment of this individual agrees with the vice lists. He continues by stating that the man would be killed by Satan, but that his *spirit would be saved* on the day of the Lord (1 Cor. 5:1-5; above, pp. 268-69). This conclusion is completely contrary to the vice lists, according to which even people who commit minor transgressions "will not inherit the kingdom of God."

From this comparison, we see that Paul's vice lists are not his considered theological conclusions with regard to the fate of individual believers who fail to meet one of his expectations. Nor are they the way in which he would have dealt with individual transgressions if he had had the steady, ongoing pastoral charge of a community. It is one thing to condemn adultery from afar, quite a different matter to look an adulterous church member in the eye and say that he or she has forfeited the hope of salvation and that there is no appeal and no forgiveness. Paul was an itinerant apostle, not a pastor, and we only occasionally glimpse him in a semi-pastoral role. In such a role, he was a good deal less condemnatory than he was in his vice lists. In fact, as we shall now see, the accusations in his vice lists are not actually directed at the sins of his converts at all.

As stated above, the contents of Paul's vice lists are not in the least unusual, granted that he was a Diaspora Jew. Every moralist in the ancient world condemned adultery, theft, greed, and the like. Paul's lists, which emphasize idolatry and sexual immorality, including especially homosexual activity (in two of the vice lists, 1 Cor. 6:9f. and Rom. 1:24-32), reflect the standard *Diaspora Jewish* view of *gentile* transgressions. Gentile moralists did not condemn people for committing idolatry, since idolaters were being good pagans: idolatry is prominent only in Jewish vice lists that condemn gentiles. But

Paul's converts had given up the most obvious forms of idolatry (1 Thess. 1:9; 1 Cor. 8, 10). This means that Paul's vice lists, which feature idolatry, were not composed to rebuke his church members. His actual advice to church members about matters connected with idolatry is contained in two long chapters in 1 Corinthians, which we examined in the previous chapter.

We have already noted that Paul sometimes wrote to his gentile converts as if they were Jews: "not with lustful passion *like the Gentiles*" (1 Thess. 4:5). In the vice lists, however, he writes as a Diaspora Jew who is condemning gentiles *in general*,³ who, of course, committed idolatry. After the vice list of 1 Cor. 6:9–10, Paul writes, "And this is what some of you used to be" (6:11). This is a direct acknowledgement that his converts in Corinth were no longer idolaters, sodomites, and so on. Paul is here describing gentiles who are not in the church and describing them in the terms traditional in Diaspora Judaism.

The lists of 1 Corinthians 5, however, were triggered by the behavior of the man who was living with his stepmother. Paul, having instructed that this man be expelled from the church, reminds the Corinthians that they should not associate with a Christian who is sexually immoral, idolatrous, greedy, and so on. But there is no reason to think that the lists of 5:9 and 5:11 have any other connection with Corinth than this one point of sexual immorality—legal incest. Having started with a sexual sin, he then adds a list from his tradition that seems not to be directed at the Corinthians' faults.

It is also a characteristic of Jewish treatment of gentile vices, especially idolatry and sexual immorality, to pronounce or predict God's punishment. While some gentiles *criticized* other gentiles'

3. Cf. Victor Furnish, *The Moral Teaching of Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 71f., 77.

sexual activities, Jews often *condemned* people for them—following, of course, the Bible. Josephus does this (*Apion* 2.199), as do the Wisdom of Solomon and Philo (quoted below).

We conclude, therefore, that Paul's vice lists are based on traditional homiletical Jewish condemnation of gentiles and were not crafted specifically for the congregations to which he sent them. Not only were his church members not guilty of the sins in the lists, they had other faults that do not appear there. We know, for example, that boasting was a fault of the Corinthian church, as were excessive spiritual displays, such as speaking in tongues, but neither appears in the vice lists included in his letter to Corinth.

I have made several proposals about the vice lists: (1) Paul's absolute condemnation of very long lists of transgressors does not represent the way in which he would have dealt with an individual in one of his churches who committed one of these sins; this suggestion is based on comparison with the man committing incest (1 Cor. 5). (2) The lists reflect criticism of gentiles that was standard in the Greek-speaking Diaspora. (3) The lists were not specifically designed to meet the needs of the congregations to which they were sent.

I do not mean to say that Paul did not “really believe” what he wrote. He was, of course, really opposed to all the transgressions in his lists. But they lend themselves neither to systematic moral theology nor to the historical recovery of the behavior of his converts.

Homosexual Activity

We return to the point that Jewish lists of gentile vices often focused on two specifically gentile issues: idolatry and homosexual activity. (Almost all societies have condemned adultery, as does Paul. Although Diaspora Jewish vice lists charge gentiles with adultery,

that vice was not peculiar to them.) Idolatry and homosexual activity stand out as being specifically gentile.

Homosexual activity was common in much of the ancient world but was condemned in the Hebrew Bible and non-biblical Jewish literature. In order to see how idolatry and homosexual activity could be linked, we may look at Romans 1, focusing on two related words translated as “exchange” (*allassō*, *metallassō*). In Rom. 1:23, gentiles are said to have “exchanged [*allassō*] the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles.”⁴ This involved exchanging (*metallassō*) the truth about God for fictions about idols: images of humans, birds, animals, and reptiles (Rom. 1:23), summarized as “the creature” in Rom. 1:25.

Idolatry then led to another exchange (*metallassō*), the exchange of *natural* sexual roles, both on the part of females and males (Rom. 1:26–27). From this starting point, which is a standard Jewish description of gentile behavior, Paul goes on to a long list of gentile vices (1:29–31).

It is especially noteworthy that in Romans the idols include images of birds, four-footed animals, and reptiles (1:23). The gods of Greece and Rome were depicted as human beings. Asclepius, the god of healing, was sometimes depicted with a snake wrapped around his staff, and occasionally with a dog at his feet, which could conceivably have led to the view that Greeks worshipped a quadruped and a reptile, but only in Egyptian religion was it typical for gods to be depicted as birds, quadrupeds, and reptiles—or, more precisely, as having animal heads on human bodies.⁵ Because of this it was said

4. In 1:23, the words “exchanged the glory” and “for a likeness” derive from Ps. 106:20 (LXX 105:20). Cf. also Jer. 2:11.

5. “Khnum of Elephantine was a ram, Hathor a cow, Nekhebt a vulture, Bast a cat, Horus a falcon, Anubis a jackal, Sebek a crocodile, Thoth an ibis, and so on”: George Foot Moore, *History of Religions* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1914–20), 1:147. As far as I have noted, Tawaret was the only god or goddess that was usually and routinely depicted as an animal, rather than as

that Egyptians “worshipped animals.” Greeks, Romans, and Jews alike looked down on Egyptians and Egyptian religion, and they criticized them for venerating animals. (To be fair to the ancient Egyptians, we should say that they actually worshipped the gods, who were represented by animal heads.)

It is likely that Paul’s list was in part based on Deut. 4:16–19, which reflects the period of the exodus from Egypt and refers to images of animals, birds, creeping things, fish, and the heavenly bodies. It is nevertheless striking that a man who had been only in the ambit of Greek religion should include so many animals. I think it likely that Paul’s list of pagan idols is further evidence of the spread of Jewish condemnation of paganism around the Mediterranean; his list was probably traditional and may have originated in Alexandria, Egypt.

Thus far we see that Paul shared common Diaspora Jewish views of gentiles: they were idolaters, and idolatry led them into various vices, notably sexual immorality. The most striking aspect of gentile sexual immorality was the “exchange” of the “natural” sexual connection between male and female for same-sex relationships (Rom. 1:25–7). “Natural” sexual relations are those that could lead to conception.

For the modern reader, the elements of Paul’s vice lists that most require explanation are those that point to homosexual activity. This is the issue on which we shall now focus our attention. If the statement in Rom. 1:26, that gentile women “exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural,” stood alone, this might mean that women performed anal or oral sex with men, rather than vaginal, but the following verse indicates that Paul had homosexual activity in mind: “*in the same way* also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another” (1:27).

Male homosexual activity is also condemned in 1 Cor. 6:9, where

a human with an animal head. Famously, the Great Sphinx reverses the usual scheme and puts a human head on a lion’s body.

Paul refers to *pornoi*, which we have already seen can appropriately be translated “the sexually immoral,” and to *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*, which the NRSV translates “male prostitutes and sodomites.” These three Greek terms have proved difficult for translators, but in my opinion unnecessarily so. I discuss the words and their translations in detail below⁶ and shall here only briefly define them.

- *Pornoi* (“the sexually immoral”): all those people of whose sexual behavior Paul disapproves
- *Malakoi* (which, with the Jerusalem Bible, I will translate “catamites”): males who are the passive recipients of anal intercourse
- *Arsenokoitai* (which, with the Jerusalem Bible, I will translate “sodomites”): males who penetrate catamites

The NRSV and the NIV obscure these terms. For *malakoi* (“catamites”) the NRSV has “male prostitutes”; the NIV also has “male prostitutes” and translates *arsenokoitai* (“sodomites”) as “homosexual offenders.”

Before we can usefully consider Paul’s terms and his meaning, however, we must gain an understanding of the subject matter. How was homosexual activity understood in the ancient world? Once we know this, we shall understand both his words and his views perfectly well.

Homosexual activity was a subject on which there was a severe clash between Greco-Roman and Jewish views. Christianity, which accepted many aspects of Greco-Roman culture, in this case accepted the Jewish view so completely that the ways in which most of the people in the Roman Empire regarded homosexuality were obliterated, though now they have been recovered by ancient

6. See pp. 363–70.

historians. I do not know of any other topic that is as foreign to modern perceptions as the ancient view of homosexual activity. Thus it should be explained in some detail.

This explanation is necessary despite the fact that homosexual practices are not very important in Paul's letters. They figure in his vice lists, as do deceit and malice, but he does not elaborate on them; they are only items in a list. We must assume that he did not actually face a case in one of his congregations; if he had, we would hear a lot more about it. A book on Paul could omit discussion of this topic without reducing comprehension of Paul's letters very much, and many books on Paul avoid it altogether.

The subject is important, however, for two reasons: (1) Christianity was finally based on a merger between Judaism and Greco-Roman culture, and homosexual practices constitute a major disagreement between Christianity's two "parents." (2) Homosexual activity poses an important question to Christianity today, and Paul is always cited in the debate. Therefore we should understand what he wrote, why he wrote it, and what he was actually writing about.

Studying homosexual activity also has the benefit of allowing us to look at sexual ethics in Diaspora Judaism, which is a large and important point in studying Paul. (See, for example, the discussion of 1 Thess. 4:3-6.)

For these reasons I have decided to devote to the topic the space that is necessary. After a good deal of debate with myself, however, I have decided to put the bulk of the explanation of homosexual practices in Appendix I, and here I shall offer only some generalizations that should suffice to make the meaning of 1 Cor. 6:9 and other passages clear. I hope, nevertheless, that readers will consult appendix I in order to see the importance of homosexual activity in Greece and Rome.

What follows is a partial account of ancient sexual practices and

attitudes toward those practices. First, I shall make a few generalizations that cover male homosexual activity throughout the non-Jewish ancient world. After the discussion of gentile views, we shall consider some aspects of sexual ethics in the Hebrew Bible. Thirdly, we shall examine in some detail the views of other Diaspora Jews on sexual ethics. In the last section of the chapter we shall return to Paul.

In appendix I, I provide a closer description of classical Athens and pre-Hellenistic Rome, and then offer a few comments on homosexual activity between females (about which we know very little).

Generalizations

In the modern world, we categorize people as being either heterosexual (the vast majority), homosexual (a substantial minority), or bisexual (a small minority). We regard these categories as obvious and therefore correct. In fact, however, categories vary from culture to culture. Our common division of three categories of sexuality did not exist in the Greco-Roman world. Their master categories were *active* and *passive*. Free adult males were supposed to be the active partners in all forms of sexual expression. Females, slaves, and boys should be passive. Free adult males should never be the passive recipients of sexual activity: they should penetrate, but never be penetrated. As John Clarke put it, “Rule number one in Roman sex: there can be no stigma attached to an elite man inserting his penis into any orifice of the body of another, as long as the other man is of an inferior status.”⁷ This seemed as obvious to Greeks and Romans as our divisions are to us. We shall see below that Paul and Philo understood this categorization of sexual activity, and we may assume the same knowledge on the part of other Diaspora Jews.

7. John R. Clarke, *Roman Sex* (New York: Abrams, 2003), 118.

In the Greco-Roman world it was regarded as *natural* for an adult male to desire both female and male partners. Society *expected* men to make love to women, especially their wives, and to sire children; the social rules did not permit men to be exclusively homosexual. Some individual men, of course, were known to prefer either male or female partners, but even men who had a strong preference for males were nevertheless expected to marry women and to have children. Although society did not require men to have sexual relations with other males (for a partial exception see Athens in appendix I), it was regarded as normal and natural for men to desire males.

Although male desire for sex with a male was understood as natural, there were restrictions. First, boys should reach the age of assent (around eleven or twelve) before adult males had sex with them (on age, see pp. 357–60 below). Secondly, there was a class distinction, as we noted above. An adult male citizen should never be the recipient of anal intercourse if he had sex with (for example) a slave. Thirdly, free adult males who played the passive role were despised. Free grown men who played the passive role were regarded either as completely dissolute, perverted, or mentally diseased. Later in the Roman Empire, this despised category of men would be legislated against and ruthlessly punished.⁸ Greeks and Romans despised effeminacy in grown men.⁹

8. See Eva Cantarella, *Bisexuality in the Ancient World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 175–81. “Until the end of the fifth century . . . the only people condemned to die were passive homosexuals” (181).

9. In describing the young men who wanted to attract males by “prolonging the bloom of youth” (*Spec. Laws* 3.39–40), Philo places some of the blame on the “licentiousness and effeminance” practiced in “many [other] nations,” where the *androgynoi* strut through the markets, head processions, and perform sacred rites. He specifies that these rites are those of Demeter, whose priests (called “galli”) were castrated in order to imitate Attis. In Rome itself, some of the Asian religions were legal, which meant that they could have processions—which would have been headed by their priests, and some of the priests of these “mystery religions” were castrated. This discussion should be separated from Philo’s description of the banquets and such of ordinary Greeks and Romans (on which, see the discussion of Philo’s *Contemplative Life* immediately below). In the mainstream of Greek and Roman thought, all forms of mutilation (including

There were always social rules, which varied somewhat from time to time and place to place, but neither Greek nor Roman society condemned homosexual activity entirely, nor was sexual activity condemned merely because it took place between partners of the same sex. The few gentile sources that oppose homosexual relations also oppose all forms of sexual activity that do not lead to procreation (e.g., intercourse with a woman who is pregnant).¹⁰ To some strict moralists, only sexual relations that might lead to procreation were in accord with “nature.”

It is very difficult to get our brains to change categories, yet we must understand that the ancient categories were different from ours. They did not divide the world into “straight” and “gay,” but rather into active and passive. A “straight” woman in our categorization would be “passive” in theirs; our “straight” man would be to them “active”—penetrating inferiors, never being penetrated by them. The complication is that in their view, some males—if they were socially inferior to their partners—could also be passive or “soft.”

Neither of these categorizations is perfect. In real life, human sexual desires and activities are very diverse and people do not always fit into neat compartments. This has been repeatedly recognized in modern scientific studies of sexuality. Alfred Kinsey, for example, developed a seven-point scale, from zero to six, which put entirely heterosexual people at zero and entirely homosexual people at six.¹¹

circumcision and castration) were abominated. Castration was also against Roman law. In the official festivals of the cities of the Roman Empire, castrated priests did not lead processions. On the passage in Philo, see F. H. Colson’s note in the Loeb Classical Library edition (7:634). On Demeter, Attis, and other Asiatic deities, see the brief account by Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987). For castration, see *ibid.*, pp. 6, 26, 77, 81, and 85. On the un-Roman aspects of priests in Asiatic cults, see Richard Gordon, “Religion in the Roman Empire,” *Pagan Priests*, ed. Mary Beard and John North (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 245–48.

10. On these, see appendix I, pp. 727–47.

11. See, for example, Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy, *Sex: The Measure of All Things: A Life of Alfred C. Kinsey*, repr. (1998; London: Chatto & Windus, 2000), 134–35.

Interviews revealed that numerous people in fact occupy every point on the scale.

Despite this scientific knowledge, which everyone should be aware of, it remains the case that most people in the West, especially in the United States, think that a “gay” man could not possibly have sex with a female—and so on. In this view, there is no scale, there are no overlaps, and everyone is either entirely straight or entirely gay, except for a few bisexuals.

Thus categories that are accepted by society tend to persist, and they have a kind of binding force: they can make life difficult for people who defy them. A free adult male in ancient Greece was beyond reproach if he penetrated the anus of a boy or a male slave, but was subject to criticism and even punishment if he allowed himself to be penetrated. For us, a politician (for example) who was known to practice *any* form of sex with another man might find his political career in jeopardy.

Judaism: The Bible

The biblical story of the love between David and Jonathan might conceivably have been interpreted to justify homosexual relations in Israelite and Jewish culture. Jonathan loved David “as his own soul” (1 Sam. 18:1, 3). He “took great delight in David” (19:1). After Saul and Jonathan were killed in battle, David offered a lament that included these lines: “I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; greatly beloved were you to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women” (2 Sam. 1:26). If later Israelite and Jewish culture had accepted homosexual activity, the friendship of David and Jonathan would probably have been seen as a case of homosexual love, as was the love between Achilles and Patroklos in later Greek culture.¹² Israel, however, took a different path, and homosexual relations were completely condemned. In fact, various passages in the

Bible, if combined, could lead to the view that the only legitimate sexual activity was that between man and woman with procreation in view:

- Onan, son of the patriarch Judah, married his dead brother's wife, as the law then required. The law also, however, specified that his children by that wife would inherit his brother's portion. To avoid giving offspring to his brother (which would diminish the inheritance of his own children), "he spilled his semen on the ground whenever he went in to his brother's wife." This displeased the Lord, who killed Onan. (Gen. 38:4-10)
- Two messengers from the Lord visited Lot (Abraham's brother) in Sodom. He offered them hospitality for the night. The men of the city surrounded the house, demanding to be allowed to "know" (have intercourse with) the two messengers. Lot offered them instead his two virgin daughters. The messengers saved the situation by striking the men of the city blind. The next day they all escaped, and the city was destroyed. (Gen. 19:1-28)
- From the period of the judges, there is a similar story about a Levite, who with his servant and his concubine was spending the night at an old man's house in Gibeah. The men of the city surrounded the house and demanded that the old man hand over the Levite so that they could "know" him. The host offered his virgin daughter and the Levite's concubine instead. This offer was rejected. The Levite himself put the concubine outside, and she was ravished by the men, who abused her until she died. (Judges 19)
- The Mosaic law twice condemns male homosexual activity. "You

12. K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 41, 53, 197, 199. Homer in fact said nothing about physical love between Achilles and Patroklos, and some careful readers denied it, but it seems that many interpreted the relationship as erotic.

shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination” (Lev. 18:22). “If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death, their blood is upon them.” (Lev. 20:13)

- The law also prohibits intercourse during a woman’s menstrual period. (Lev. 18:19; 20:18)

These passages obviously condemn homosexual activity, and Lev. 20:13 commands the execution of both the passive and the active partners. The story of Onan and the prohibition of intercourse with a menstruant led to the view on the part of at least some Jews that sexual relations must be aimed at procreation. Male semen should not go to waste. Josephus offers this brief summary of biblical law as he understood it: “The Law recognizes no sexual intercourse, except the natural [*kata physin*] union of man and wife, and that only for the procreation of children. It abhors the [sexual intercourse] of males with males, and it punishes any guilty of such assault with death” (*Apion* 2.199).¹³ This summary logically excludes not only homosexual relations, coitus interruptus (Onanism), and intercourse during menstruation, but also intercourse when the wife is pregnant, which is never mentioned in the Bible.

I do not wish to propose that all Jews accepted this extension of the biblical passages. The most obvious reading of the biblical evidence was that sexual activity should be limited to vaginal intercourse between man and wife, except that even this form of intercourse was forbidden during menstruation. The Bible does not support Josephus’s view that husband and wife should have sex only if the woman could become pregnant.

13. This is Thackeray’s translation in the LCL, slightly amended in order to render the terms more literally.

Greek-Speaking Judaism in General

To understand Paul, we shall consider in some depth the views of other Greek-speaking Jews. This is one of the major objectives of the present chapter. We begin with the Greek translation of the two passages in Leviticus that deal with homosexual activity. Lev. 18:22 commands, “do not lie with a male [*arsen*] as one goes to bed [*koitēn*] with a woman.” According to Lev. 20:13, “whoever lies with a male [*arsen*] as one goes to bed [*koitēn*] with a woman—they have both committed an abomination.” This reminds us of Paul’s condemnation of men who have relations with men (*arsenes en arsesin*, Rom. 1:27) and of men who go to bed with men (*arsenokoitai*, a simple combination of “male” and “go to bed with,” 1 Cor. 6:9).

The most illuminating parallel to the Pauline material, especially the vice list in Romans 1, appears in the Jewish work called the *Wisdom of Solomon*.¹⁴ We noted above that “Solomon” is a pseudonym. This important work was written in Greek, in Egypt, probably in the first century BCE or the first century CE. In *Wisdom of Solomon* 13, the author begins a description of the errors of paganism, beginning with idolatry. He makes distinctions: worship of the stars or other natural forces is wrong, since it confuses the creature with the creator (cf. Rom. 1:25), but it is understandable, since these creations are beautiful and powerful (13:1–9). He then writes a detailed and colorful criticism of a worse kind of idolatry: worshipping the idols made by humans (13:10–14:11). It is noteworthy that he mentions the worship of images of animals as well as of men (13:10–13). We recall that the Egyptians depicted most of their gods as having animal heads.

From idols the author moves to immoral actions. He begins by stating that “the making of idols was the beginning of sexual

14. On Paul and the *Wisdom of Solomon*, see above, pp. 323 n. 14; 352–56.

immorality [*porneia*]"(14:12). After a further discussion of idolatry, he returns to the theme that it causes immorality, now making use of a vice list:

It was not enough for them to err about the knowledge of God. ... For whether they kill children in their initiations, or celebrate secret mysteries, or hold frenzied revels with strange customs, they no longer keep either their lives or their marriages pure, but they treacherously kill one another, or grieve one another by adultery, and all is a raging riot of blood and murder, theft and deceit, corruption, faithlessness, tumult, perjury, confusion over what is good, forgetfulness of favours, pollution of souls, sexual perversion, disorder in marriage, adultery, and debauchery. For the worship of idols not to be named is the beginning and cause and end of every evil. (Wis. Sol. 14:22-27)

We see here the causal relationship between *idolatry* and *sexual immorality*, which is obvious in Paul's lists, especially Rom. 1:25-31. Moreover, like Paul, the author of *Wisdom of Solomon* explicitly includes the (Egyptian) worship of animals; like Paul, he expresses his view of gentle sexual activity by using a vice list; like Paul, he pronounces condemnation on the gentiles. More precisely, according to Wisd. Sol. 12:27, God condemns idolaters, and it is idolatry that leads to sexual sins, which means that sexual transgressors are also condemned (see also 14:29-31).¹⁵ This, I think, reveals the logic of Paul's vice lists, and certainly the list in Romans 1. If it is idolatry that leads to other transgressions, including even gossip and the like, then it is reasonable to condemn everyone on the list, because their numerous transgressions only reflect the result of idolatry. Similarly, since Leviticus condemns to death males who have homosexual intercourse, condemnation readily attaches itself to other sexual sins.

Sexual transgressions dominate the list in the *Wisdom of Solomon*:

15. The author also details the historical punishments of gentiles (referring, for example, to the plagues against Egypt) with considerable enthusiasm (e.g., chaps. 15-17).

impure marriages, adultery (v. 24), sexual perversion, disorder in marriage, adultery (again, using a different Greek word), debauchery (v. 26). There are more terms in this list than there are transgressions: the list has been rhetorically enhanced by saying the same thing more than once. Not only are there two words for “adultery,” impure marriage and disorder in marriage may be only further words for the same transgression.

Two other terms require comment. The item translated “sexual perversion” (v. 26, *geneseōs enallagē*) is literally “interchange of genesis,” where “genesis” probably refers to the means by which life is generated, sexual intercourse. “Interchange of genesis,” then, is perversion of what should be used to generate life. David Winston points to partial parallels: “interchange (*enallagē*) of the works of nature” (Philo, *Cherubim* 92); in Sodom, people “interchanged (*enēllaxe*) the order of nature” (*Testament of Naphtali* 3:4); and, most strikingly, Paul’s statement that “their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural” and that men similarly “left the natural use of women” (Rom. 1:26–27.).¹⁶ In all these passages the words for “change” or “interchange” are from the same root as Paul’s verbs, *lassō* and *metalassō*. Thus three sources from the Greek Diaspora are very closely related to Romans 1:26–27. The Jewish *Sibylline Oracles* constitute a fourth source, but I have decided not to quote them at length. One passage is quoted in note 26.

Jews thought that the only *natural* form of sexual activity was vaginal intercourse between man and woman. It is probable that all of these phrases about “interchange” or “exchange” refer to homosexual activity (though they could refer to anal or oral intercourse between man and woman). The last word in the list, debauchery, is a

16. David Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1979), 280; I give a literal quotation of part of Rom. 1:27.

translation of *aselgeia*, which is also often translated “licentiousness,” and which often, though not always, refers to sexual immorality.¹⁷ This passage in the Wisdom of Solomon reveals Jewish condemnation of gentile society, focusing on two points: idolatry and sexual practices.

The works of Philo of Alexandria provide an abundant number of illuminating passages. Because he also describes Greco-Roman homosexual activity very precisely, I shall offer three substantial passages from his writings.

Philo of Alexandria

We have met Philo before, but here I shall give him a brief introduction. Philo lived approximately at the same time and in the same place as the author of the Wisdom of Solomon, though most scholars put Philo a little later. In any case, Philo was a Jew who was an older contemporary of Paul and who lived in Alexandria. His wealth and learning made him one of the leading Jews in the Roman Empire. Fairly late in his life, in 40 CE, he led an embassy to the emperor Gaius (Caligula) to seek his support for Alexandrian Jews after a pogrom under the governor Flaccus.

Philo was very well educated in Greek philosophy, and he wrote numerous volumes in which one of the main aims was to present Judaism as the true philosophy. Our present interest is his passages on gentile idolatry and immorality. His works contain attacks on idolatry, numerous hostile comments on gentile sexual ethics, and vice lists.

One of his criticisms of idolatry (without a vice list or a discussion

17. *Aselgeia*, “licentiousness,” appears in Gal. 5:19, where it follows “sexual immorality” and “impurity”; here both “impurity” and “licentiousness” are probably sexual transgressions; the three words are followed by “idolatry.” In 2 Cor. 12:21, Paul worries about people who did not repent of “impurity and sexual immorality and licentiousness”; again, all three probably refer to sexual behavior.

of sexual immorality) appears in his comments on the second commandment in his treatise on *The Decalogue* (the Ten Commandments). It is reminiscent of the Wisdom of Solomon and Rom. 1:25. Some gentiles “give worship and service to sun and moon and the whole heaven,” but this offense is much less serious than that of those who worship gods made of wood, stones, and precious metals. They should have known that the craftsman is superior to his product, but for some reason they do not worship the craftsmen, but instead the images that they make. But the worst form of idolatry is that of the Egyptians, who give divine honors to irrational animals (*Decalogue* 66–81).

Elsewhere, we find idolatry, sexual immorality, and a vice list in the same passage. At the feasts held to worship pagan gods, the worshippers “cleanse their bodies with lustrations and purifications, but they neither wish nor practice to wash off from their souls the passions by which life is defiled.” They wear spotless white robes, but their hearts are spotted. They will not sacrifice blemished or damaged animals, but their own souls are “a mass of wounds” (*Cherubim* 94–96). He offers a description of their behavior at religious festivals in the form of a vice list. They permit themselves

freedom from the fear of punishment, from sense of restraint . . . drunkenness, tipsy rioting, routs and revels, wantonness, debauchery; lovers thronging their mistresses’ doors, nightlong carouses, unseemly pleasures, daylight chamberings, deeds of insolence and outrage, hours spent in training to be intemperate, in study to be fools, in cultivating baseness, wholesale deprivation of all that is noble: the works to which nature prompts us are turned upside down [literally, interchange of the works of nature, *physeōs ergōn enallagē*] . . . (*Cherubim* 92)¹⁸

Sex and alcohol seem to receive about equal space in this vice list.

18. On “interchange” or “exchange,” see above, p. 342–43.

“Interchange of the works of nature” probably refers to sexual transgression, especially homosexual activity.

A shorter list is found in his treatise *On the Confusion of Tongues*: “All the deeds of war are done in peace. Men plunder, rob, kidnap, spoil, sack, outrage, maltreat, violate, dishonour, and commit murder . . .” (*Confusion* 47). His masterpiece of list-making, however, is found in *The Sacrifices of Abel and Cain* 32, where he lists 146 vices that are the results of loving pleasure—without mentioning any of the most obvious ones. Thus Philo, like Paul, used vice lists and condemned several aspects of gentile society, including especially idolatry and sexual immorality.

In other places, Philo wrote passionately against homosexual practice, which, to him, was one of the chief faults of non-Jewish culture. In these passages we shall see the important distinction between the active and the passive partner and, in two of them, an emphasis on age: the age when boys were regarded as being eligible for sex with men.

The fullest treatment comes in *The Special Laws* 3.37–42, where Philo is commenting on Lev. 18:22 and 20:13, which prohibit sexual relations between males; the second passage (as we saw above) decrees death for both partners. In Philo’s discussion, one of the words for homosexual intercourse is *to paiderastein*, “to commit pederasty”; that is, to love a boy sexually. We shall see, among other things, what Philo makes of this practice. I shall use italics to indicate points that are especially relevant to our main goal of putting Paul’s views in context.

In former times, Philo writes, it was disgraceful to mention pederasty, but now those who are engaged in it, not only the active partner *but also the passive*, boast of it. The passive partners become effeminate,¹⁹ by which Philo means that they braid and adorn their hair; they use cosmetics on their faces; they anoint themselves with

perfume, as women do. “The transformation of the male nature to the female is practised by them as an art and does not raise a blush” (§ 37). The law (that is, the Jewish law) condemns both to death. The resulting *androgynos* (man-woman) should not be allowed to live for even an hour. He is “a disgrace to himself, his house, his native land and the whole human race.” The *active* lover (*ho paiderastēs*, the *erastēs* of a *pais*, boy) “may be assured that he is subject to the same penalty. He pursues an *unnatural* pleasure . . .” (§38–39). He also teaches other males to be “*unmanly*” and “*soft*” (*malakos*, §39).²⁰

The attack on the passive partner, the *androgynos*, continues for another page, and Philo twice uses the word *softness* (*malakias*) to describe him (§39, 40). This will become important below. I should also mention, since few people seem to be aware of this material, that Philo states that some of the effeminate try to change into women by mutilating their genital organs (§41).

Philo’s second discussion of homosexual activity appears in his treatise *On the Contemplative Life*, in which he praises the Therapeutae, a Jewish sect that withdrew from society. He contrasts their chaste festivals (§40, 64ff.) first with those of the wealthy members of the empire, who imitate “Italian expensiveness” (§48), and then with two famous symposia attended by Socrates and described by Xenophon and Plato (§57). What is common to all these gatherings (that of the Therapeutae and those attended by Socrates) is that people ate and conversed. Both of the gentile occasions, however, also feature homosexual desire.

With regard to those who fancy Italian opulence, Philo writes that the slaves who are in attendance are really there to “give pleasure to

19. “Passive” is *paschontes*; “effeminacy” is *thēleia*, §37.

20. On blaming the active partners for corrupting the passive, see also *Spec. Laws* 2.50: wicked men are pederasts and force “the male type of nature to debase and convert itself into the feminine form.” Furnish points out that Plutarch was of the view that homosexual intercourse demeans the passive partner (*Moral Teaching*, 66). In Philo, this is clearly a subordinate argument.

the eyes of the beholders.” Female slaves, however, do not appear.²¹ Instead, there are, first, *boys* who pour wine. Second, there are *youths* who are smooth shaven, and whose faces are adorned with cosmetics; they also have *long hair*. “They wear tunics fine as cobwebs and of dazzling white girt high up.” Third are *young men*, “newly bearded with the down just blooming on their cheeks, recently pets of the pederasts” (§49–52). From this it appears that it is the second group, youths (young teenagers), who are “tarted up,” though all three sets of males are intended to please the eyes of the beholders—that is, of the beholders who matter, who are mature men. We especially note that the youths are shaven, while the (older) young men have new beards. This means that the youths have shaved their bodies, not their faces, since their beards have not begun to grow.

Philo then turns to Plato’s *Symposium*, which, in his view,²² is mostly concerned with love, not only heterosexual love, which is a desire subject “to the laws of *nature*,” but also the love of “men for other males differing from them only in *age*” (*Contemplative Life* 59). Philo again criticizes the effeminacy of the passive males, who are called men-women (*androgynoi*) (§60). Homosexual passion reduces “the boy to the grade and condition of a girl,” and also damages the lover (§61). In this discussion, Philo uses the standard Greek terms: the “beloved” (*eromenos*) and the “lover” (*erastes*), rather than the terms “the passive,” “the soft,” “the unmanly,” and “the effeminate” on the one hand, and “the pederast” on the other—the terms that appear in *Special Laws* 3, discussed above.

The third passage on homosexuality appears in the treatise *On Abraham*, where Philo discusses the destruction of Sodom. The

21. This will be a surprise to those whose views of opulent Roman banquets are derived from Hollywood.

22. See Colson’s criticisms of Philo’s understanding of Plato in the LCL edition of Philo’s works, 9:521f.

Sodomites committed adultery, but also “men mounted males without respect for the sex nature which the active partner shares with the *passive*” (*paschontas*) (§135). They “accustomed those who were by *nature* men to submit to play the part of women” (§136).

These are three quite different discussions. In the second, *On the Contemplative Life*, Philo shows that he knows the standard Greek view, which in his day had been accepted by many Romans, and he uses the terms appropriate to that view (*erastes* and *eromenos*—the lover and the beloved). This discussion highlights *age*: youths, and perhaps boys, were the objects of the romantic passions of mature men. We note that the slaves who had recently begun growing beards were also recently “the pets of pederasts,” but presumably so no longer. The slaves who wore translucent garments and cosmetics were older than boys but too young to produce enough facial hair to qualify as the beginning of a beard. Their body hair, however, had begun to grow and thus was shaved. Similarly, Philo’s discussion of Plato’s *Symposium* makes it clear that boys were the objects of men’s desire. Philo had grasped the Greek view precisely.

These boys who were suitable for being penetrated by adult males would begin to sprout body hair and would become unsuitable when they had too much body hair. They were then expected to grow up to be men who pursued boys.²³

Matters are slightly different in the first passage summarized above. In the *Special Laws* Philo is commenting on Leviticus, which says nothing about age. Therefore he is principally interested in condemning sexual activities between males. There are still, however, some interesting points with regard to age. It is probably not very significant that he uses the term “*pederast*,” “lover of boys,” since he

23. In the “Athenian ideal” regarding sex between men and boys, intercourse should be between the thighs, and the anus would not be penetrated.

may not have had the etymological meaning of the term in mind. He refers, however, to “prolonging the bloom of the young and emasculating the flower of their prime,” a difficult clause that seems to imply efforts to keep the passive partner youthful (§39). And later he mentions the “youthful beauty” of effeminate males, which some of them try to heighten by castration (§41).

In the third passage, on Sodom, he refers only to men, not boys or youths, who are made to play the part of women. The biblical story (Gen. 19:4–11) refers to men who desire men, not boys (e.g., 19:5), and this explains Philo’s usage.

There are six principal points to be drawn from these passages:

1. Philo regarded men in the non-Jewish world as being very interested in sexual relations with other males.
2. He condemned all homosexual activity. Philo shared the dislike of passive adult males that was common in the Greco-Roman world and railed against them especially, but, being Jewish, he condemned both the active and passive partner. Philo’s discussion of Sodom emphasizes God’s destruction of the city and the people (*Abraham* 131–41); his treatment of Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 warmly echoes the Bible’s death sentence for homosexual activity (*Spec. Laws* 3.38–40). Since Philo did not combine idolatry and gentile homosexual practice in a vice list, he does not go from these two transgressions to condemnation of all who practice other vices, as did Paul and the Wisdom of Solomon. Many of Philo’s passages condemning homosexual activity merely echo the biblical story of Sodom and the prohibition of male homosexual relations in Leviticus.
3. The closer he comes to discussing pagan customs—not the biblical text—the more he emphasizes that mature males desired young males. No biblical passages at all are in mind in *The*

Contemplative Life, and there the question of age dominates. It is entirely missing from his brief summary of the story of Sodom, but it makes an appearance in the *Special Laws*, when he goes beyond the biblical prohibition (in Leviticus) and expands on the present, indicated by “now” in §37.

4. He makes a clear distinction between the passive partner and the active partner: the passive partner is the “beloved,” the “effeminate” (*thēleia*), the “man-woman” (*androgynos*), the one who is unmanly (*anandrios*); he is characterized as having “softness” (*malakia*),²⁴ and he is explicitly called the “passive” (*paschōn*).²⁵ The active partner is “the lover” or the “pederast.”
5. Philo regards homosexual activity as being against *nature* as well as against the Mosaic law.
6. His discussions reveal that some males wished to remain passive partners beyond their youth. They took steps to look and to be more effeminate, and passive males “now”—in Philo’s own day—even boasted of their activity. Thus Philo knew the Greek convention that males should grow out of playing the female (passive) role in sex, but he also shows that some did not. The Athenian ideal was doomed to failure. Some youths learned to like being the passive recipients of anal intercourse.

Other Jewish literature written in Greek reveals the same principal points as Philo’s works: Jews knew about various models of homosexual activity in the pagan world, and they condemned them all. According to the *Letter of Aristeas* (probably Alexandrian and

24. The adjective *malakos* is more common than the noun *malakia* in this meaning (a passive homosexual). In the present passage (*Spec. Laws* 3.39), Colson (LCL, *Philo* 7:498–501) translates *anandrias* and *malakias* as “unmanliness and effeminacy.” “Unmanliness and softness” would be closer to the Greek (though less intelligible to most readers).

25. The Greek verb *paschō* has a range of meanings, including “to experience,” “to undergo” some experience, and “to be acted upon.” The last two indicate the sexual meaning of the term.

earlier than Philo, perhaps 100 BCE), “We [Jews] are distinct from all other men. The majority of men defile themselves in their relationships . . . they not only procure males, they also defile mothers and daughters” (152).²⁶

Paul

We now return to Paul’s passages, and we begin with the terminology of 1 Cor. 6:9. I give the Greek words and three English translations.

Greek	NRSV	NIV	JB
<i>pornoi</i>	fornicators	the sexually immoral	people of immoral lives
<i>malakoi</i>	male prostitutes	male prostitutes	catamites
<i>arsenokoitai</i>	sodomites	homosexual offenders	sodomites

Two of the major translations dodged the issue of precisely who is being condemned by combining the second and third Greek words in a single general term: “sexual perverts” (RSV), “people guilty of homosexual perversion” (NEB). The two words, however, have distinct meanings. To anticipate the results of our study below, the NIV has the best translation of *pornoi* (“the sexually immoral”), while the JB is best on the second (“catamites” for *malakoi*), and the JB and NRSV both correctly translate *arsenokoitai* as “sodomites.”

The first word, *pornos* (plural, *pornoi*), is related to *pornē*, which in classical Greek is a female prostitute; the word is related to *porneia*, prostitution (as well as to related words meaning “brothel,” “brothel-keeper,” and the like.) Thus one might suppose that a *pornos* is a male prostitute, and this is a possible translation. In classical literature,

26. One could also cite several passages in the Jewish *Sibylline Oracles*, such as 2.73, “do not practice homosexuality,” *mē arsenokoitein*, literally “do not bed males,” putting the activity on a par with extortion and murder. We note that it is the active role that is condemned.

however, a *pornos* is usually either a catamite or a sodomite (as we noted above, a catamite is the passive partner in male homosexual intercourse, while a sodomite is the active partner).²⁷

Paul, however, seems to use *pornos* as a general word meaning “a person who is sexually immoral.” This agrees with his usage of *porneia* , classically “prostitution,” to mean “any form of sexual immorality.” The evidence for this view is (a) that *porneia* and *pornos* head lists that then specify sexual sins; the assumption is that he first generalizes then specifies. (b) *Porneia* is used when no specific vice seems to be in view. (c) In one passage, he uses *pornos* when the meaning cannot be catamite, sodomite, or male prostitute, but refers rather to a *heterosexual* sin (see below).

To explain Paul’s own terminology, it is simplest to begin with *porneia* , specifically “prostitution” or generally “sexual immorality.”

Porneia in 1 Cor. 5:1 is followed by the statement that a man is living in a legally incestuous relationship: “there is sexual immorality among you . . . a man is living with his father’s wife.” *Porneia* here could not mean “prostitution.” In 1 Cor. 7:2 Paul permits marriage “because of *porneia* ,” that is, to avoid it. This could mean “to avoid using prostitutes,” but is probably more general: to avoid any illicit sex. In 2 Cor. 12:21 and Gal. 5:19, *porneia* is grouped with “impurity” and “licentiousness,” all three of which probably point to sexual misconduct, but we cannot say that each item in the list is a different kind of sexual activity; these are synonyms. According to 1 Thess. 4:3, Paul’s converts should avoid *porneia* , which is probably not

27. See H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* , rev. by H.S. Jones. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958 (hereafter LSJ), *s.v. arreno-* . Timarchus, the accused in the Athenian trial cited above, was called a *pornos* , probably meaning that as an adult he accepted anal penetration, rather than that he necessarily took money (see Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* , 39); the term refers to prostitution in Aristophanes’s *Wealth* ; see *ibid.* , 146.

limited to use of prostitutes, since the passage deals with “controlling his own vessel,” which cannot refer to a prostitute (see below).

On the other hand, *porneia* in 1 Cor. 6:13, 18 probably means “prostitution,” since the use of a female prostitute is explicitly mentioned in 6:15–16. Paul conceivably meant the preceding and concluding summaries in verses 13 and 18 more generally, “flee sexual immorality” (6:18), but “flee the use of prostitutes” is the simpler reading. In this case the substantive participle *ho porneuōn* in 6:18 is “the one who uses a prostitute”; this person “sins against the body itself.”²⁸

Thus in Paul’s surviving letters, *porneia* usually means “sexual immorality” in general, but sometimes specifically refers to prostitution.

Pornos is probably general, “a sexually immoral person,” in 1 Cor. 5:9–11: “I wrote to you in my [previous] letter [α Corinthians] not to associate with sexually immoral people”; here and in 5:11 *pornoi* are the only sexual transgressors (see the lists, pp. 336–37 above), and the reference is probably to the man in 1 Corinthians 5 who was living with his stepmother. In this case, the *pornos* is not a male prostitute, a catamite, or a sodomite: he is, rather, committing incest with a woman. This probably determines the meaning in the vice list in the next chapter, 1 Cor. 6:9: *pornoi*, idolaters, adulterers, catamites, and sodomites (and others) will not inherit the kingdom of God. The list starts with *pornoi* in the sense of “the sexually immoral,” followed by the other main gentile sin, idolatry, followed by specific kinds of sexual immorality.

Thus I think it most likely that *pornoi* in 6:9 means “sexually immoral people” in general (so the NIV). “Fornicator” (NRSV and NEB) is not correct: the usual meaning of “fornication” is heterosexual

28. On 6:13b–19, see above, pp. 301–5.

activity between two people, neither of whom is married. It is not a general term that includes homosexual activity.

The next sexual sin in 1 Cor. 6:9 is adultery, the meaning of which is straightforward (a sexual relationship in which at least one of the partners—usually the woman—is married to someone else).

This brings us to the second and third words listed above, *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*. The meanings of these words should not be in dispute, though of course some people dispute the obvious. *Malakos* is “soft,” *malakia* is “softness,” and, when used in a sexual context, both refer to *adult males who are passive in homosexual relations*. We saw this meaning in *Spec. Laws* 3.37–40, where *malakia* appears with “the unmanly” (*anandrios*), “effeminacy” (*thēleia*), the “man-woman” (*androgynos*), and the “passive” (*paschōn*). Moreover, “soft” is frequently used in both Greek²⁹ and Latin (*mollis*)³⁰ to refer to such males. It was a very derogatory term. In 1 Cor. 6:9, therefore, *malakoi* are adult males who are passive in homosexual activity.

Correspondingly, *arsenokoitai* are their active partners, literally “those who bed men.” The singular is *arsenokoitēs*, where *arsen* means “male” and *koitēs* means “one who beds”—that is, who has intercourse with. Just as the *paid-erastēs* is the man who (actively) loves a *païs*, boy, an *arseno-koitēs* is the man who (actively) “beds” an *arsen*, a male. The formation is precisely the same as “manpleaser” in English: “one who pleases man,” not “a man who pleases [others].” In classical Greek, however, the more common spelling of similar compound words is *arreno-* rather than *arseno-*. Thus, for example, an *arrenomanēs* is “a man who is mad for males.”³¹

29. See BDAG s.v. *malakos*; Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, 79 (*malthakos*); Cantarella, *Bisexuality in the Ancient World*, 192f. (*malakos*).

30. Cantarella, *Bisexuality in the Ancient World*, 112f., 155f., 192f. and frequently (see the index); Amy Richlin, *The Garden of Priapus: Sexuality and Aggression in Roman Humor* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 92 and elsewhere.

The combination of *arsen* (male) and *koitē* (bed) to refer the active partner in a male homosexual act is, as far as I can tell, largely Jewish, doubtless being based on the Greek translation of Lev. 18:22 and 20:13. I shall repeat these passages: “do not lie with a male [*arsen*] as one goes to bed [or has intercourse: *koitēn*] with a woman” (18:22); “whoever lies with a male [*arsen*] as one goes to bed [*koitēn*] with a woman—they have both committed an abomination” (20:13). The admonitions of these passages, like most of those in ancient literature, address males: you males must not have intercourse with a male *as you do* with a female, namely, by penetrating her. This terminology led Diaspora Jews to use the noun *arsenokoitēs* (a male who penetrates another male) and the verb *arsenokoitein* (to penetrate a male). The noun appears in 1 Cor. 6:9 and the verb in *Sibylline Oracles* 2.73 (n. 26 above).

Thus I conclude that in 1 Cor. 6:9, after *pornoi*, “the sexually immoral in general,” and adulterers, Paul lists passive adult males who accept anal penetration (“catamites”) and the males who penetrate them (“sodomizers”).

To summarize our discussion of Paul’s terminology: the translation of *pornoi* in the NIV is correct (sexually immoral people); the Jerusalem Bible correctly translates *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*, “catamites” and “sodomites,” though “sodomizers” would be better, since the English ending *-izer* is similar to the Greek ending *-tēs*.

These words—catamites and sodomites—are probably not clear to many readers, and I certainly sympathize with attempts to find words that are more common. Victor Furnish translates them “effeminate males and men who have sex with them,”³² which is reasonably

31. See LSJ, s.v. *arreno-*.

32. Furnish, *Moral Teaching*, 69.

accurate. “Effeminate grown men,” in the ways described above, would be more precise.

Whatever terms are used, it is impossible for a translation to convey the importance of the ancient categories “passive” (or “soft”) and “active,” the different evaluations in the Greco-Roman world of active and passive males, or the distinctiveness of Diaspora Jewish authors in *condemning both*. Everyone looked down on “soft” adult males, but the active males who penetrated them were simply behaving normally.

Recently a few scholars have proposed that *malakos* (“soft”) means not a passive adult male but more particularly a male prostitute, and this proposal has determined the translations of the NRSV and the NIV, two of the translations that are most widely used today.³³ It is this view that has led me to such a lengthy examination of terms in 1 Cor. 6:9. A close study of classical Athens would reveal that an adult male citizen who was used sexually by a series of males would be regarded as being motivated by money, since it was believed that this activity was not pleasurable. But by the first century, everyone knew that a lot of males played the passive role for reasons of pleasure or preference. No one called Julius Caesar a prostitute. Philo did not call the passive males of whom he wrote prostitutes. He had a wide range of terms for them, as we saw, but “prostitutes” was not one of them. On the contrary, he wrote about “soft” males who *boasted* of passive homosexual activity; who adopted feminine garments, hairstyles, facial decoration, and the like, in order

33. This view (the “soft” were male prostitutes) has been proposed by several New Testament scholars. For a discussion of these proposals and a firm refutation, see Cantarella, *Bisexuality in the Ancient World*, 191–94 and notes. I generally agree with Cantarella, but I should note that her statement that Paul was the innovator of global condemnation of homosexual acts (193) shows that she did not pay adequate attention to Philo, the *Sibylline Oracles*, and other Jewish sources.

to prolong their acceptability to mature males; and who so much wanted to be female that they had themselves castrated.

I have not cited much evidence from first-century Rome, and so on the question of who was or was not considered to be a prostitute, I shall quote a paragraph from Amy Richlin's fine study of Roman sexual humor. We now switch from Greek to Latin terminology. Cicero, who figures in the paragraph, lived from 106 BCE to 43 CE.

Besides being called *pathicus* or *effeminatus*, a [sexually passive] man might be called *mollis*, "soft," or any of a dozen adjectives connoting weakness or delicacy. A common insinuation was that the man was too graceful in his physical movements; a joke ascribed to Cicero about his son-in-law Piso has him recommend his daughter to "walk like your husband." (Macrob. *Sat.* 2.3.16)³⁴

That is, Piso's manner of walking indicated that he was effeminate.

Thus on the question of the "soft" and prostitution, one must make distinctions; by no means were all of the "soft" prostitutes. Cicero did not think that his effeminate son-in-law was a prostitute, what Furnish calls a "call-boy";³⁵ Piso was a wealthy aristocrat. The Latin terms cited by Richlin, like the Greek terms used by Philo, which include "soft," did not necessarily denote male prostitutes.³⁶ Cantarella, discussing Juvenal (late first- to early second century CE) and Martial (late first century), indicates that by then there were numerous aristocratic males who were "soft," and were therefore ridiculed, but who were not prostitutes.³⁷

34. Richlin, *Garden of Priapus*, 92.

35. Furnish, *Moral Teaching*, 72.

36. The Latin *pathicus* indicates a male who *submits* to sex; it is derived from the Greek *pathikos*, which is in turn related to *paschō* (above, 362); on *paschō*, *pa(th)-scho* see Herbert Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), 526 d, 169; *effeminatus* is equivalent to the Greek *thēlus*, *thēleia* (above, pp. 358, 362); we have already seen that the Latin *mollis*, "soft," is equivalent to Greek *malakos*.

37. Cantarella, *Bisexuality in the Ancient World*, 154; cf. pp. 155, 162–63. See also Seneca, *Epistles* 47.7.

On the basis of first-century evidence, then, there is no reason to regard the “soft” as male prostitutes or abused young slaves. All male prostitutes were “soft,” but not all the “soft” were male prostitutes.

The advantage of the translation “male prostitutes” lies, I suspect, in the debate about homosexuals in contemporary Christianity: if the “soft” in 1 Cor. 6:9 are prostitutes, then the men who bed males are men who use male prostitutes. This interpretation means that here Paul condemns male prostitution, just as he condemns the use of female harlots later in the chapter, but he does not denounce all males who engage in homosexual acts. That is, many good church people wish Paul not to have condemned homosexuality as such, since his condemnation is often applied to homosexuals today.

Today we know a lot more about homosexuality than the ancients did, and we know that some people are born that way. Here I shall briefly abandon my preferred role, that of historian, and say that I do not agree with those who wish to defrock gay clergymen or excommunicate gay laypeople.

That is, as a Christian I agree with the liberal attitude toward homosexuals in much of contemporary Christianity. If I were running a church, I would do my utmost to combat condemnation of homosexuals and also actions that would limit their roles in my church. But I also think that those of us who hold this view should not yield to selective and arbitrary biblicism by playing the same game: “proving” our views by selectively revising and quoting the Bible. We should let Paul say what he said, and then make the decisions that we should make, which should take into account the modern world, rather than only the ancient world.³⁸

The first fault of biblicism—the view that modern Christians should believe and do precisely what biblical authors believed and did—is

38. Furnish agrees wholeheartedly with this point (*Moral Teaching*, 79–80).

that it is always anachronistic: the world changes. A lot of the oldest parts of the Bible had fallen into disuse in the first century and are also not observed today. I shall give a few examples:

1. The ancient Israelites were polygamists, but first-century Jews and Christians did not imitate Abraham, Solomon, and others by multiplying wives and concubines. A biblicist might today urge polygamy, but most modern Jews and Christians are selective and reject it, usually without thinking about it at all.
2. The law that led Onan to spill his seed on the ground, namely, the requirement that a man should marry his brother's widow and that his children by the widow should receive the dead brother's inheritance, fell out of use a long time ago. Among other problems, it requires polygamy, since the surviving brother might already have a wife.
3. According to Num. 5:2-3, people who had come into contact with a corpse should be expelled from "the camp," that is, an inhabited area. This rule was not enforced in the first century, nor is it observed today, though it is in the Bible. Today, both Jews and Christians continue to reside in towns and cities after burying the dead.
4. Paul and the Corinthians believed in being baptized on behalf of the dead (1 Cor. 15:29). As far as I know, only the members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints today engage in this practice, though it is biblical.
5. Paul thought that men should wear their hair short and that women should have long hair but cover it in church (above, pp. 281-85). The second of these views was maintained in the Roman Catholic Church for a long time, but now both of them have disappeared from modern western Christianity. Lots of

men have long hair, and lots of women go to church without wearing a head-covering.

6. Perhaps most to the point, Paul's vice lists are generally ignored in church polity and administration. Christian churches contain people who drink too much, who are greedy, who are deceitful, who quarrel, who gossip, who boast, who once rebelled against their parents, and who are foolish. Yet Paul's vice lists condemn them *all*, just as much as they condemn people who engage in homosexual acts.

Following this last point: if Christians wish to keep today a biblical sexual law that is fundamental to the Bible, they should observe the prohibition of adultery. This is one of the Ten Commandments, it figures in numerous biblical stories (such as David and Bathsheba), and it is emphasized in the New Testament. In fact, it is one commandment that Jesus made stricter: he forbade remarriage after divorce and considered it to be adultery (e.g., Matt. 5:31-32). But this view, despite its very strong place in the Bible, is generally disregarded: adultery, divorce, and remarriage after divorce all flourish. It is now quite common even for Catholics to be given "annulments" in lieu of divorce.

The last point reveals the selectivity and arbitrariness of biblicists: they attack people who have some of Paul's vices, or one of them, but not those who have the others. Dealing with homosexuals, they fall back on quotation, "But Paul said . . ." They do not, however, try to expel from the church, or from ministerial office, those who are guilty under one or even several of Paul's other rubrics. Many Christian churches today are more tolerant of adultery and greed than they are of homosexuality. There is nothing in Paul that justifies this distinction.

Thus, if I understand the rationale for the translation of *malakos* as

“male prostitute” (it limits Paul’s statements on homosexual activity), I sympathize with the motive. But my response to the problem is different. I wish first simply to explain what Paul wrote: he was a first-century Jew, and on ethical questions he ordinarily followed Jewish views precisely; more particularly he was a Diaspora Jew, and therefore likely to be even more rigid on sexual ethics than were his contemporaries in Jewish Palestine.

Diaspora Jews had made sexual immorality and especially homosexual activity a major distinction between themselves and gentiles, and Paul repeated Diaspora Jewish vice lists. I see no reason to focus on homosexual acts as the one point of Paul’s vice lists that must be maintained today.

As we reach the conclusion of the chapter, I should remind readers of Paul’s own view of homosexual activities in Romans 1, where both males and females who have homosexual intercourse are condemned: “those who practice such things” (the long list of vices, but the emphasis is on idolatry and homosexual conduct) “deserve to die” (1:31). This passage does not depend on the term “soft,” but is a completely unambiguous condemnation of all homosexual activity. He was completely in agreement with Philo and other Diaspora Jews.

Finally, we should also recall that Paul’s vice lists are not in any case his systematic position on the loss of salvation or church membership (above, pp. 337–39). The spirit of even the man who was to be expelled for legal incest would be saved when the Lord returned (1 Cor. 5).

The Corinthian Correspondence, Part 5: Resurrection and the Future in 1 Corinthians 15 and Related Passages

Introduction

In this chapter and the next I shall attempt to cover the various aspects of Paul's thought about the future in all of his letters, including Philippians and Romans, which we have not yet reached. Galatians contains very little about the future. Most of the material discussed in the present chapter comes from the Corinthian correspondence.

The importance of this subject in early Christianity needs little explanation: if Jesus' followers had not been convinced that God had raised him from the dead, his movement would have remained a relatively minor one, and it would almost certainly have died out after a few years. Jesus was neither the only first-century Jewish miracle worker, nor the only Jewish teacher of rigorous ethical standards, nor the only one who emphasized the compassion and mercy of

God, nor the only charismatic leader. That is not to say that he was merely average, but only that Christianity has always depended on his resurrection. As Paul put it, “If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom. 10:9).

I shall make no effort to discover what “really happened” in and around Jesus’ tomb outside Jerusalem. The evidence presents various problems, which I have briefly discussed elsewhere.¹ This topic, however, lies outside the scope of a book on Paul, where what matters is what Paul thought, which we shall examine in some detail.

In addition to the belief that God raised Jesus from the dead, the beliefs that he would return from heaven and that dead believers would rise, to be saved along with those who were still alive, were also central in early Christianity.

Study of this topic has special advantages in addition to its importance in Christianity. Paul discusses the resurrection of Jesus, his return, and the future of believers in several letters; the various passages overlap in interesting ways, revealing continuities, shifts of emphasis, new ideas, and clever arguments. I think that this is the most engaging single topic for people to study entirely on the basis of close examination of the relevant passages, without utilizing external sources. Using a computer or a copy machine, one can put the passages side by side in chronological order, and compare and contrast. A concordance will be helpful but is not absolutely necessary. I am now, in effect, going to conduct this study, though I shall not print all the passages side-by-side. This does not mean, however, that it will then be pointless for the reader to study the passages independently. On the contrary, one really understands only what one sees for oneself.

1. E. P. Sanders, *Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Allen Lane, 1993), 276–81.

The most important passages in Paul's letters relevant to *Jesus' return* and the *resurrection of believers*, in the probable sequence in which they were written, are these: 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 15; 2 Cor. 3:18—5:10; Phil. 1:23-24; 2:16-17; 3:10-11; 3:20-21; Rom. 6:5; 8:18-30; 13:11-12. We begin, however, with Paul's knowledge of Jesus' own resurrection.

The Resurrection of Jesus

That God raised Jesus was basic to Paul's own faith and to his message. He sometimes uses the noun *anastasis*, "resurrection," as in Phil. 3:10-11: "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection"; so also Rom. 1:4; 6:5. In 1 Thess. 4:14, 16 the verbs "rose" and "will rise" translate *anistēmi*; these are the only uses of this verb in this context. Saying that Jesus "rose" might imply that he rose of his own power. More often, Paul uses the verb *egeirein*, "to raise," either in the active voice—God raised Jesus—or in the passive voice, "Jesus was raised," with "by God" understood.² This very clearly attributes the power to God. Sometimes Paul used the phrase "the one who raised" Jesus as a circumlocution for "God" (Rom. 4:24; 8:11). A good example of Paul's use of *egeirō* is found in Rom. 4:24: Righteousness "will be reckoned to us who believe in *him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead*, who was handed over to death for our trespasses and *was raised for our justification*." Other passages are 1 Thess. 1:10; 1 Cor. 6:14; 2 Cor. 5:15; Gal. 1:1; Rom. 6:4, 9; 7:4; 8:11, 34; 10:9. In 2 Cor. 1:9, God is identified as the one "who raises the dead," where "the dead" is plural in Greek, referring to both Christ and those who believe in him.

The first believers had of course announced Jesus' resurrection

2. In grammatical terms, Paul preferred the transitive verb *raise* to the intransitive verb *rise*. This emphasizes that Jesus did not rise by his own power, but that God raised him.

not long after the event, and this report had reached Paul—though we do not know where or when. In any case, his persecution of the early Christian movement meant that he knew what their basic beliefs were; one of these was faith in Jesus’ resurrection, which Paul evidently did not accept.

In or near Damascus, however,³ God “revealed his Son to” Paul (Gal. 1:16).⁴ This revelation changed his life; nothing is more basic to Paul the apostle than the fact that the resurrected Jesus appeared to him. He does not, however, provide much description. Besides the brief and non-descriptive reference in Galatians 1, in 1 Cor. 9:1 Paul mentions the bare fact that he had “seen Jesus our Lord.” In 1 Cor. 15:5–8 he gives a list of Jesus’ appearances, concluding with his own experience: “last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.” This makes no distinction in kind between his vision of the risen Lord and that of Peter and the others. We cannot be sure what to make of this fact: it could be apologetic, part of Paul’s campaign to make himself as important as the Jerusalem apostles. Or it could be that he really thought that he had seen Jesus in the same form as did Peter.⁵

In either case, we learn later in 1 Corinthians 15 that Paul thought that the risen Lord had a body, but not one “of flesh and blood”; he calls this a “spiritual body.” (See 1 Cor. 15:42–50, discussed more fully below.) This passage is Paul’s only discussion of Jesus’ resurrection that gives any clue as to what he had seen.

Paul regarded Jesus’ resurrection appearances as over: Jesus had appeared to him “last of all” (1 Cor. 15:8), and Paul says not a word

3. See above, pp. 20–21.

4. “To” in this verse is the preposition *en*, which more often means “in.” Paul uses *en* with the dative instead the simple dative in 1 Cor. 2:6; 2 Cor. 4:3; thus I would not translate “in me,” but rather the traditional “to me.”

5. We considered above (pp. 94–96) the view of Acts, that at the time of his conversion Paul had not seen Jesus, but rather a bright light.

about possible appearances to subsequent believers, such as his own converts. Others were to believe the witnesses' testimony that God raised Jesus, and for confirmation they received the Spirit, which testified to them that they too were sons of God (e.g., Gal. 4:6). Paul could also say that Christ, rather than the Spirit, "lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). "Spirit" and "Christ" are combined in Rom. 8:9b, "anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him."

Thus Paul spoke of Christ not only as alive in heaven, but also as present in the lives of believers. This was their assurance that God had raised him.

The Return of the Lord

First Thessalonians, as we saw above (pp. 179-82), reveals that Paul had told the Thessalonians that the Lord would return, *not* that they would die and join him in heaven. That is, in Paul's earliest years as an apostle of Christ, he taught that God had raised Jesus, that Jesus now lived in heaven, and that he would soon return. The resurrection of believers was not part of Paul's original message, or at best played a minor role, since he thought that the Lord would return almost immediately. When some of his church members died, he promptly offered the resurrection to comfort those who were left behind. In this, his earliest surviving letter, he assured them that the Lord would return, that the dead in Christ would rise, and that both dead and living would greet Christ in the air. This passage, along with parallels in the Gospels, has been considered above (pp. 207-12). For convenience, I shall print it again, noting where the word *parousia* ("appearance" or "coming") occurs, which Paul sometimes used as shorthand for "the return of the Lord."

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have

no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming [*parousia*] of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a command, with the voice of an archangel, and with a trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, at the very same time will be snatched up with them in the clouds to greet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words. (1 Thess. 4:13–18 [cf. Matt. 24:27f.; 16:27f.])

In verse 17, the word that I have translated “greet” (*apantēsis*) is usually translated “meet” (so the NRSV, NIV, JB, NEB). “Greet” makes it a little clearer that the Lord is on his way to earth, which is Paul’s probable meaning: they go up to greet him on his way down. “Meet” might (but need not) imply that they all stay “in the air.”

In any case, the expectation that Jesus would come to earth to reign for a while is explicit in 1 Cor. 15:24–26, where Paul allows a time during which Christ reigns until he defeats all his enemies, the last of which is death. Only then does he turn the kingdom over to God (15:24). If death exists during most of Christ’s reign, it follows that he is ruling on earth. Paul could have changed his mind about this between 1 Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians, but I think it more probable that during the early part of his ministry, and as late as 1 Corinthians, he foresaw a kingdom on earth.⁶ In this case, both the raised and living Christians *greet* the Lord in the air in order to

6. For the evidence that Jesus himself had expected the kingdom of God to come to earth (as in the Lord’s prayer, “thy kingdom come”), see Sanders, *Historical Figure of Jesus*, 172–74. For the view that Paul expected the Christians to stay “in the air” with Christ, see Heikki Räisänen, “Did Paul Expect an Earthly Kingdom?” in *Paul, Luke and the Graeco-Roman World*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 217, ed. Alf Christophersen et al. (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 2–20 and also *The Rise of Christian Beliefs* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 98–102. Räisänen has a good argument (as he always does), and I think that the decision could go either way.

accompany or escort him in triumph to earth. This agrees quite well with some other uses of *apantēsis*.⁷

When he was in Thessalonica, then, Paul proclaimed the resurrection of Christ and his speedy return. Even when he replies to the Thessalonians' concern about the dead, we can still see that the return of the Lord had first place in his proclamation. The resurrection of dead believers looks like a kind of "fallback" position that Paul brought forward when the Lord tarried. The saying of the Lord that Paul quotes and modifies (printed just above) is about the *parousia*, and statements about resurrection are added as a preface (vv. 13–14) or patched into the saying itself. The "patches" are "we who are alive . . . will by no means precede those who have died" (v. 15); "and the dead in Christ will rise first" (v. 16).

This gives the dead temporal priority in greeting the Lord, which one hopes comforted the grieving. But, still, the basic saying is about the *parousia*, the return of the Lord. The emphasis on the return of Jesus is also clear when one looks at the distribution of the word *parousia* in this meaning (1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23). Four of the five occurrences are in Paul's earliest surviving letter, and the fifth is in what is probably the second oldest surviving letter. Especially noteworthy is 1 Thess. 5:23: "may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming [*parousia*] of our Lord Jesus Christ." Paul thought that most of the Thessalonians would still be alive.

In saying that the resurrection of the dead was Paul's "fallback" position, I do not mean that he found the idea of resurrection strange and went to it reluctantly. As a Pharisee, he had presumably always believed in the resurrection of the dead, and he now certainly believed that Jesus had been raised. Thus when believers died, the

7. Thus, for example, in Matt. 25:6 the bridesmaids go out to greet the arriving bridegroom. See also LXX Judges 11:31 and elsewhere.

solution that they would be raised when the Lord returned was entirely obvious and natural.

Before turning to the resurrection of believers, we should briefly note further passages that refer to the return of the Lord. One of the aspects of Jesus' return, in Paul's view, was the judgment of believers. As he wrote in 2 Cor. 5:10:

All of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil.

This judgment, which is of "us," Christians, will take place when the Lord returns, as a study of "the day of Christ" and similar phrases reveals (see immediately below). On that day, Paul thought that he himself would be examined, and he wanted to be able to boast of the Corinthians, just as they could boast of him (2 Cor. 1:14). Paul referred to this examination in 1 Cor. 4:4-5:

I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore do not pronounce *judgment* before the time, before the *Lord comes*, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive commendation from God.

Further references to the return of the Lord, including the day of judgment, are "the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:8); "the day of the Lord" (1 Cor. 5:5); "the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6); "the day of Christ" (Phil. 1:10; 2:16); cf. "the day of wrath" (Rom. 2:5); "the day when God judges human secrets" (Rom. 2:16).

That the day of judgment or wrath is the day of Christ is clear in 1 Cor. 1:8; 3:13; 2 Cor. 5:10. From beginning to end Paul expected Christ to return and, among other things, judge believers. (On unbelievers, see p. 421 below.)

The Resurrection of Believers

First Corinthians 15 reveals that after learning of the Thessalonians' fears that their dead friends and relatives would miss out when the Lord returned, Paul shifted his emphasis, giving greater weight to the resurrection of believers. The Corinthians (we now learn) had trouble with the idea that they would die and be raised, which means that Paul had spent some time on the topic during his founding visit. I shall repeat the probable sequence of events:⁸

1. Paul founded the church at Thessalonica.
2. He went to Athens.
3. He sent Timothy to Thessalonica, who reported back to Paul.
4. Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians.
5. He founded the church at Corinth.
6. After other travels, some years later he wrote our 1 Corinthians.

Since Paul founded the church at Corinth after he had heard from the Thessalonians and had responded, he had time to adjust his message to take account of the problem of death prior to the return of the Lord. When he wrote 1 Thessalonians, the adjustment had only begun, and the return of the Lord during the lifetime of the believers was still very prominent. In 1 Corinthians, the resurrection of dead believers is very prominent and the expectation that those to whom he wrote would still be alive when Christ returns seems to be fading. There is no way of knowing what balance Paul struck between these two expectations during his first visit to Corinth, but we may be sure that the believers' resurrection was an important part of his message.

First Corinthians 15 is a long and sometimes difficult chapter, and I shall discuss only some of its main aspects, including the most difficult

8. See pp. 234–37.

part. We shall begin with two questions: Did the Corinthians reject Jesus' resurrection? Did they reject all forms of life after death?

In 15:12-19 we learn that some of the Corinthians said that "there is no resurrection of the dead" (15:12). "The dead" is *plural* in Greek. (Here English does not distinguish singular from plural.) Paul replies that if there is no resurrection of the dead (plural), then Christ was not raised (v. 13). In this case, the Corinthians' faith was in vain (v. 14). It would also follow that the dead in Christ have perished forever (v. 18).

We gather from this argument that the Corinthians believed in the resurrection of Christ. This is assumed in Paul's argument that the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of believers go together, so that denying the second means denying the first, which apparently the Corinthians did not wish to do. Moreover, they also would not want to think that the dead in Christ have perished forever, since they practiced baptism on behalf of the dead (15:29). Thus, Paul argued, if you wish to believe that the dead have not perished forever (which you do), and you think that your own faith is valid (which you do), and if your faith includes the resurrection of Christ (which it does), you must assent to the proposal that all Christians will be raised from the dead. The Corinthians, it appears from this line of argument, did not doubt either life after death or Christ's resurrection, but rather a general bodily resurrection. Presumably they thought that their souls would survive, but in a non-bodily form.

Paul himself had believed in the resurrection in general prior to his call to be an apostle of Christ, and consequently he did not think that it needed any proof other than the resurrection of Christ. He based his case on this point, adding the fact that the Corinthians were being baptized for the dead as a supporting but secondary point.

Fortunately after this forceful argument Paul did not declare victory and retire, with the result that we learn a little more about

what the Corinthians and he thought. After making his point about baptism on behalf of the dead in verse 29, he was only halfway through the argument, which ends in verse 58. From the rest of the chapter, we can see more fully what the Corinthians' problem was and understand how they could believe in Christ's resurrection and their own life after death but not accept the resurrection of the dead in general.

The problem seems to have been the *body*, a topic that Paul takes up in 15:35, "But someone will ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?'" He begins his reply, "Fool!" (v. 36). But it was not foolish of the Corinthians to wonder about the body. Bodies decay. I do not know whether or not they knew that decayed bodies feed vegetation, which is eaten by animals, which are eaten by humans, so that the same chemicals are used in humans over and over. Let us say that they did not know this. They still knew that bodies decay. How could they then be raised? What would a raised body be like?

Being Greek (or at least living in Greece), they probably accepted some form or other of common Greek body/soul dualism. This is easy to explain, since it is part of our cultural heritage, though many people who now accept body/soul dualism do not know that it is Greek rather than Jewish in origin.

The idea is this: humans consist of a soul in a body; the soul (*psychē*) is fundamentally *immortal*. It leaves the body at death and goes to another world. In the common Greek view, based on the *Odyssey*, this other world was not Paradise, but the House of Hades, a rather dull, grim place (not a place of torture), where souls carried on a weakened form of life.⁹ By the first century, the search for ways

9. There was no religious dogma in Greece, and so variety flourished. With regard to views of the afterlife and the places of abode of the dead I take the underworld of Homer's *Odyssey*, book 11, as a kind of standard, though there are different views even in Homer. There is a brief survey on

of achieving a happy or blissful afterlife was well underway, having begun at least as early as the fifth century BCE.¹⁰ But whatever the Corinthians thought of the fate of the soul, they probably shared the view that it could not die.

The body (*sōma*), however, could not live beyond the appointed span of years. It was a mere shell that would be cast off; as some people put it, the body was a tomb of the soul, which in Greek is alliterative (body/tomb is *sōma/sēma*).¹¹ The soul would eventually be freed of this tomb. Body/soul dualism may go by other names, such as: “inner/outer dualism” or “individual dualism.” In the next chapter we shall meet “cosmic dualism,” the view that there are good and bad powers that govern people.

This common Greek view explains the Corinthian rejection of the bodily resurrection of dead people very well. Christ’s resurrection, they could have thought, was a one-time special event. He was, after all, the Son of God, and he, both body and soul, ascended to the right hand of God. But their own dead bodies were going to decay. This does not mean that the Corinthians denied eternal life; on the contrary, they accepted it. When they were baptized on behalf of the dead they were doubtless thinking of saving the souls of the dead, not their bodies. To Paul, however, baptism was physical and was performed on the body. Baptism for the dead should prove belief in the resurrection of dead bodies.

In the present chapter, Paul does not speak of the individual’s “soul”

the afterlife by F. R. Walton in *OCD2*, 23–24; the entry on “afterlife” in *OCD3* gives numerous helpful references. Perusing the index of Walter Burkert’s *Greek Religion* will turn up entries on “afterlife,” “soul, immortality of the,” “underworld,” and other relevant topics (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985). The classic work by Erwin Rohde, *Psyche* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1925), though outmoded in some ways, gives a wealth of detail.

10. See, e.g., Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 293–95.

11. According to Plato, *Cratylus* 400 c, this was an Orphic formulation. Similar phrases, however, were fairly common. See, e.g., Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation* 1.108; *Questions and Answers on Genesis* 4.74, 77. See especially Rohde, *Psyche*, 359 n. 73, 392 n. 19.

(*psychē*) or “spirit” (*pneuma*), and he resolutely treats the individual as a unity: the whole person dies and will be raised. Elsewhere, however, he does distinguish between the inner and outer self. In 1 Thess. 5:23, he writes, “your spirit and soul and body,” where there is probably no substantive difference between the first two. In Phil. 1:27 there is a similar usage: “stand in one spirit, striving together in one soul” (NRSV “one mind,” NIV “as one man”). In 1 Cor. 5:5, he says that the “flesh” of the sexually immoral man will be destroyed, but that his “spirit will be saved on the day of the Lord.” In 2 Corinthians 1–9, Paul uses “spirit” to refer to a person’s inner self (see also 2 Cor. 2:13; 7:1,13; in some of these cases the translators render *pneuma*, “spirit,” as “mind”). Thus Paul was not totally opposed to Greek body/soul dualism (though instead of “soul,” he usually used “spirit”).¹² Nevertheless, when it came to the Corinthians’ doubts, he insisted on resurrection of the body.

Resurrection was originally a Persian (Zoroastrian) conception.¹³ The Jews had acquired it during the years when Palestine was part of the Persian Empire (538–332 BCE), and it was accepted by many (or most) Jews—not just Pharisees.¹⁴ Resurrection of the body and immortality of the soul would eventually be combined in some Jewish circles and also in Christianity: a person dies; the soul goes to

12. I do not know of any cases in which Paul used “soul” (*psychē*) unambiguously and alone to refer to the inner person. It joins “spirit” in this meaning in 1 Thess. 5:23 and in Phil. 1:27 (invisible in most translations), but more often it simply means “self,” “life,” or “person”: for example, “every soul” in Rom. 2:9 means “every person”; “my soul” in Rom. 16:4 means “my life.” Possibly he consciously refused to use the familiar Greek contrast of “body” with “soul” (preferring “flesh” and “spirit”), or possibly he was influenced by the LXX’s use of *psychē* as a translation of the Hebrew *nephesh* (which usually means “self,” “life,” “living being” or “person”), so that *psychē* had come to mean for him “self,” “life,” or “person.”

13. Mary Boyce, “Persian Religion in the Achaemenid Age,” in *Cambridge History of Judaism*, ed. W. D. Davis and Louis Finkelstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 1:301; Shaul Shaked, “Iranian Influence on Judaism: First Century B.C.E. to Second Century C.E.,” in *Cambridge History of Judaism*, 1:323.

14. Jewish hope for the future is a large topic. For a review, see Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief* (London: SCM, 1992), chap. 14.

heaven; later all bodies are raised and soul and body reunite.¹⁵ This is a simple combination once one thinks of it. Some of the later Pauline passages (in 2 Corinthians and Philippians) entertain the possibility of the separation of soul and body, as we shall see, but neither separation nor reunion can be found in 1 Corinthians 15.¹⁶ The whole person dies and later is raised.

The Corinthians' objection to the resurrection of the body was probably based on experience (they knew that bodies decay) and culture (they believed that every person has an immortal soul), but possibly also on distaste: the vision of rotting body parts ascending to meet the Lord in the air is a good deal less elegant than the wisp of a soul slipping out of the body at death.

Though Paul wanted the Corinthians to drop their objections to the resurrection of dead bodies, he did take their overall point seriously, as 15:35–58 shows. To cut to the bottom line before filling in the details: he accepted a substantial part of their position, but he wanted to cling to the word *body*. When the Corinthians read 15:50, “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable,” they probably stood and cheered, and they may have organized a victory march around the house where they met. This is the Greek view: what perishes (to them, the body) cannot inherit what is imperishable.

Paul's argument in favor of the resurrection of the *body* in 15:36–49 may have left them puzzled, since he granted the main point: decayed bodies do not attain eternal life. Moreover, the arguments by which he attempts to prove that the body is raised are still difficult for the reader.

15. On separation of soul and body in some Jewish texts, and a few examples of their reunion, see *Testament of Abraham* rec. A 20.12 and my note h in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 1:895.

16. See the discussions of 2 Cor. 4:16; 5:1–9; Phil. 1:19–26 below.

Paul's Arguments in Favor of Bodily Resurrection

1. He first argues on the basis of agriculture: what comes to life must first die, but what comes to life is not the same body as what died. One plants a seed, it “dies,” and from it a plant comes to life. This is still a “body,” though a different body (vv. 36–38). This argument does not really solve the problem, since a stalk of grain is also going to decay. Paul presses on.
2. There are different kinds of flesh: human flesh, quadruped flesh, bird flesh, fish flesh (v. 39). Same problem: all decay.
3. There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies (v. 40). This is better for Paul's point. We must bear in mind the fact that Paul did not have modern scientific knowledge of the composition of the sun, the moon, the planets, and the stars. To the ancient observer, they emit light but are not consumed by fire, which makes them quite different from earth, where the production of light requires the destruction of what burns. Thus it was reasonable to think that the heavenly bodies are *different sorts* of bodies from those of earth. Moreover, the stars appear changeless, while the planets move but do not otherwise change, which makes it appear that planets and stars are different from each other.¹⁷ While some Greek philosophers had once thought that the heavenly bodies were lumps of stone and the like, this was by no means a common view in the classical period and later. Many people identified the planets as gods, and some also thought that the stars were gods.¹⁸ We do not know what Paul thought about the composition of the heavenly bodies, but he

17. Sufficiently long study of the heavens reveals that the stars also move; the Corinthians may or may not have known this.

18. In the *Laws*, Plato has the Athenian remark that “the situation has been precisely reversed since the days when observers of these [heavenly] bodies conceived them to be without souls” (967 a–b); see Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 327.

would have had no reason to think that they were composed of the same elements as the earth. To him, as to the vast majority of ancient people, heavenly bodies were different from earthly bodies. In Walter Burkert's phrase, "the world of the heavenly bodies is exempt from terrestrial physics."¹⁹

4. The heavenly bodies differ from one another in "glory" (v. 41). Not much help, though we should remember "glory." Paul's point, again, is that there are different kinds of bodies. He wants to keep the word *body* while granting that it is not the same as the fleshly body, which decays.

On the basis of these four proposals, Paul reaches a temporary conclusion:

So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body [literally, a "soulish" body], it is raised a spiritual body. (15:42–44)

This relies on the third analogy in verse 40: what is raised is a *different body* from the one that is buried, though not a different kind of *flesh*, which, as we have already seen, Paul dispenses with (v. 50). The raised body is heavenly (v. 40) and therefore imperishable (v. 42). This becomes Paul's solution, as we shall see.

Those who find Paul's arguments about different kinds of bodies in 15:36–44 puzzling or fumbling may find useful the following explanation by a student:

Maybe [the Corinthians'] concern caused [Paul] to think much more seriously about what he meant when he described the resurrection of the body. He could have been figuring it out as he wrote chapter 15. On

19. For a brief account of ancient cosmology, see Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 325–32. The quotation is from p. 330 and refers to Aristotle. On the bodies of the gods in Epicureanism, see J. M. Rist, *Epicurus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 140–42, 172–75.

the other hand, I think it is possible that Paul had a kind of experience that we all have sometimes when we know what we mean ourselves but we don't know how to say it. Perhaps, especially after his experience of encountering the risen Lord, he knew exactly what the resurrected body would be like. However, I would imagine that would be a difficult thing to explain.²⁰

Before continuing with his main effort to define what may be indefinable, however, he offers an interesting biblical argument, in which he goes back to Genesis and works on the vocabulary of the Greek translation (1 Cor. 15:45-9). He distinguishes a *psychikos* ("soulish") body from a *pneumatikos* (spiritual) body. This is very tricky, and it is one of the easiest passages in Paul to misunderstand. I doubt that the Corinthians understood it very well, since he wrote it with the Greek text of Genesis in mind (which they may not have had, much less have memorized), and his use of the passage about Adam is rather clever. Nevertheless, the general point can be grasped if one simply reads the English translation of 15:44-49: humans first have Adam's earthly body; at the resurrection believers will have Christ's heavenly body. As is usually the case, Paul's point is clear even when his argument is difficult.

English, however, cannot reveal what Paul actually does with Genesis. I shall explain the Greek, starting with Gen. 2:7, which Paul quotes in 15:45. I shall put in square brackets the words that Paul has in his version of Gen. 2:7 that do not appear in the LXX: "the [first] man [Adam] became a living soul" (*psychē*).²¹ English translators of both Gen. 2:7 and its quotation in 1 Cor. 15:45 have "became a living

20. Andrea Wigodsky, "The Resurrection Body in 1 Corinthians 15," term paper, Duke University, 1999 (quoted with permission).

21. Paul's Greek text of the Jewish Scripture may have contained either "first" or "Adam" or both. "Adam" appears in other Greek versions of Gen. 2:7, namely, those of Symmachus and Theodotion. See Edwin Hatch and Henry Redpath, *A Concordance to the Septuagint and the Greek Versions of the Old Testament*, 2 Vols., Clarendon press, repr. 1954 Supplement, p. 5 (printed at the end of vol. 2). On "first," see further below.

being,” which is of course what the passage means, but the Greek translation of Genesis has “living *soul*” (*psychē*).²² This is probably one of Paul’s reasons for not wanting to use “soul” for what lives eternally.²³ Adam became a living “soul,” and he died. In English, we occasionally use the word *soul* in the same way: “Was anyone there?” “Not a living soul,” that is, not a living person. That is the way Genesis and Paul use “soul” in the present texts. “Soul” here simply means “an ordinary human being.” Thus, as Paul writes, “It is sown [=buried] a *psychikos* [“soulish”] body” (15:44a): since, according to the Bible, Adam became a living *soul*, and when he died a “soulish body” was buried.

This stands the ordinary meaning of *psychē* on its head. To the ordinary Greek speaker, the *psychē* was a disembodied soul. In Gen, 2:7 and 1 Cor, 15:44, however, the word refers to Adam’s natural body, or to the Adamic body. Paul may have been deliberately using the quotation to get rid of the standard Greek view of the immortal soul. The word *soul* refers to the physical body.

Well, if what is buried is the “soulish” body, what lives? “It is raised a spiritual [*pneumatikos*] body” (15:44b). Paul then gives the exegesis: “If there is a soulish body, there is also a spiritual body” (15:44c). Translators, realizing that “soulish body” will make no sense to anyone who does not look at Gen, 2:7 in Greek, usually translate it either “physical body” (e.g., the NRSV) or “natural body” (e.g., the NIV). In our terms, of course, Adam had a physical or natural body,

22. As noted above (n. 12), the Hebrew word is *nephesh*, which usually means “person,” “life,” “living being,” and the like. Thus “living being” is a perfectly accurate translation of the Hebrew of Gen. 2:7. The Greek translators, however, frequently rendered the Hebrew *nephesh* as “soul” (*psychē*), rather than “person” or “being.” *Psychē* also has a range of meaning, and for the reader of the Greek Bible in particular, *psychē* might well mean “ordinary human life.”

23. A review of all occurrences of *psychē* in Paul’s letters reveals a range of meaning. It is striking, however, that apart from the quotation of Gen. 2:7 in the present passage, where he takes *psychē* to mean “mortal person,” he avoids the word in his eschatological passages. For the use of “soul” along with spirit in non-eschatological passages, see 1 Thess. 5:23 and Phil. 1:27 (above, n. 12).

but Gen. 2:7 used a word that Greek readers would construe as “soul,” the invisible, immortal, inner self. This very likely puzzled his gentile readers.

Paul’s exegesis, “if there is a soulish body, there is also a spiritual body,” is quite in line with ancient Jewish argumentation: if the sacred text says or implies that Adam had a “soulish body,”²⁴ this must be different from *some other* body, or else the adjective would not have been needed. Since Adam’s soulish body was what we would call “physical” or “fleshly,” the other body must be something else. Paul comes up with “spiritual body” as the alternative to Adam’s “soulish body.” It is an odd phrase, but we can at least see how he arrived at it.

The exegetical theory that shapes his argument is this: if the text says *A*, it implies that there is or will be a *non-A*. “Soulish body” implies some other body: “if there is a soulish body there is also a spiritual body.”

Paul then observes that the soulish (*psychikos*) body, Adam, was first. We saw above that he remembered Gen. 2:7 as having the word *first*; his quotation reads “The first man, Adam,” where the LXX has only “the man.” The addition of “first” was obvious. A lot of Jewish texts that survive in Greek refer to Adam as “the first-formed,” and there is nothing remarkable about inserting “first” in the quotation of Genesis.²⁵ Since Adam, the living soul, was *first*, there must be a *second* man or a *last* man, because of the same exegetical principle: one word, especially a word like “first,” cries out for other adjectives.²⁶

24. In 15:45, Paul correctly quotes Gen. 2:7 as saying “living soul.” But his comments in verses 44, 46 assume that the meaning is “soulish body.” He needs the word “body” for his argument, but in any case it was perfectly reasonable for him to interpret “living soul” in this way.

25. “First-formed” is *prōtoplastos*, derived from *prōtos*, “first” and *plassein*, “to form” or “shape” (*plassein* appears in Gen. 2:7–8 and elsewhere). For Adam as *prōtoplastos*, see *Testament of Abraham*, rec. A, 11.9f., my note in *OTP*, 1:888 n. e, and Albert-Marie Denis, *Concordance grecque des pseudépigraphes d'Ancien Testament*, s.v. *prōtoplastos*.

26. The phrase “first world war” came into use only after the next major war was designated the

Moreover, the word *living*, which the Bible applies to Adam, must also imply a different adjective. Paul concludes that if the *first* man Adam was a *living soul*, there must be a *second* man who will be “a *life-giving spirit*.”

Gen. 2:7 Implies, according to 1 Cor. 15:44-46

first man second man

living life-giving

soul spirit

This is good, solid ancient Jewish exegesis. From the story of the first man, Adam, Paul derives proof that there must be a second man who will be different from Adam. Jewish Scripture proves something that is not in it, but Paul employs a common technique of interpreters.

This is worth an example from outside Paul’s correspondence. Jewish rabbis, following the Pharisees, were of the view that lots of verses in the Hebrew Bible prove that the dead will be raised, even though there is only one verse in Jewish Scripture that clearly predicts a resurrection, and that resurrection is only of “some” (Dan. 12:2). Moreover, the rabbis could also “prove” that people whom God punished with death in this world would not be further punished in the world to come. No passage in the Hebrew Bible says this either, obviously, since the world to come is almost entirely missing. So how did they prove such things? I give one example: In Joshua 7, Israel suffers a military reversal, and the Lord explains to Joshua that the reason is that someone had taken booty after a previous military victory, though the Lord had forbidden this to be done.²⁷ A man

“second world war.” “First” implies second, next, last, or some other word. In most discussions of Adam the “first-formed,” of course, the implied contrast is with all other humans, not a singular “second” human.

27. The spoils of war were declared *herem*, “devoted” to the Lord, and therefore not to be taken by the Israelites.

named Achan turned out to be guilty and confessed (Josh. 7:19–21). Joshua spoke to Achan: “Why did you bring trouble on us? The Lord is bringing trouble on you this day.” Then Achan was stoned (Josh. 7:25). A rabbi pointed out that the text says that Achan was troubled *this day*, which implies that he would not be troubled on some other day, namely in the world to come.

The exegetical technique is the same as Paul’s, and the point is similar. “This day” is *A*, and it proves that there will be a *not-A* day for Achan. Since “this day” was his last day on earth, there must be a world to come. Similarly since he was “troubled” (*A*) this day, on the future day he would not be troubled (*not-A*).²⁸ Thus the passage also proves that punishment in this world atones; he will not be punished twice for the same sin.

Thus, by using Genesis, which speaks of a “first Adam,” Paul proves that there will be a “second Adam.” Genesis 2:7 could equally well imply that there would be “many Adams” to come, but one of Paul’s exegetical possibilities was “second,” and that suited his purpose.

At this point in his argument (through 15:46), Paul has established that Gen. 2:7 proves that there would be a second man who would be a life-giving spirit. He has one more point, which he makes in the very same way, quoting a few other words from Gen. 2:7: “The [first] man was from earth, [made of] dust” (15:47a). The word *dust* does not appear in the LXX of Gen. 2:7 as we now have it, but it is in the Hebrew, and both Paul and other Greek-speaking Jews knew that it was in the text.²⁹ It is possible that Paul knew and remembered the Hebrew, but also possible that the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible that he knew had retained the word *dust*. The surviving Septuagint (the LXX) is not necessarily identical with the

28. *m. Sanhedrin* 6:2; see more fully Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 173.

29. *Sib. Or.* 8:445, speaking of Adam, states that he was “formed of dust.”

Greek text that Paul knew.³⁰ The only important point here is that Paul was quoting the Bible in verse 47a, which the RSV, NRSV, NIV and JB fail to acknowledge with quotation marks. These words from Gen. 2:7 prove that the second man is “from heaven”: since the first man was “from earth, [made of] dust,” the second man must be from heaven, and not made of dust. Thus we may now expand our list:

<u>Gen. 2:7</u>	<u>Implies, according to 1 Cor. 15:44-47</u>
first man	second man
living	life-giving
soul	spirit
from earth, of dust	from heaven

Now, at last, after all this careful exegesis of Genesis, Paul can conclude,

As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven. (15:48-49).

The Corinthians, like all humans, are like Adam, living souls made of dust from the earth; but they will be like the second Adam, at least in some respects: they will bear the image of the heavenly Lord, who is not of the dust of the earth. It is on the basis of this that Paul writes what I offered above as the bottom line: “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (15:50). He has, after a struggle, answered the question of verse 35, “With what kind of body do they come?” Those who are raised will have *spiritual*, heavenly bodies, *like the body of the raised Jesus*.

Paul then tells the Corinthians “a mystery” (15:51), and the mystery

30. Cf. n. 21 above (on Adam in Gen. 2:7).

proves that Paul has not forgotten the problem of the Thessalonians (that some will die before the Lord returns), nor has he surrendered the view that he and others will still be alive when the Lord returns.

We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. (15:51f.)

The trumpet has been carried over from the saying of the Lord in 1 Thess. 4:16 (paralleled in Matt. 24:31). This will be the time when the dead rise with transformed, spiritual bodies, while the living experience the same transformation. Paul retains the scene of 1 Thessalonians 4 (and the passages in the Gospels about the Son of Man), but in writing to the Corinthians he now adds that at the *parousia* the dead and living who greet Christ will have bodies, not flesh and blood, but spiritual.

We should emphasize again that in this chapter Paul takes no account of an immortal *inner person*, parked somewhere waiting to join the transformed body. He presents the drama as taking place all at once, “in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet” (v. 52). He continues by saying that the perishable, mortal body must *put on* imperishability or immortality. “Death has been *swallowed up* in victory” (vv. 54f.). When we combine “putting on,” “swallowing,” and “change” (v. 51), we see that the scheme is not the reunion of soul and body. The perishable body that constitutes the entire person “puts on” and is changed into an imperishable body.

Moreover, Paul has done what he could entirely to dispose of the word *soul* as useful in discussing the future life.³¹ Adam became a living soul, and Adam (to repeat) died. “Soul,” in 1 Corinthians 15, is a word for the mortal body (thus the translations “physical” and “natural” in the NRSV and NIV). We do not, of course, know for

31. On the meanings of *psychē* in Paul's letters, see n. 23 above.

certain that the Corinthians had directly said to him that the soul was immortal and that they therefore could not accept the idea of resurrection. But if they did use the word *soul* in this way, Paul went to considerable effort to counter it.

In 15:52, we should make special note of the fact that Paul uses the third person when speaking of “the dead (plural) [who] will be raised” and the first person when speaking of those who will be changed: “we will be changed.”³² Paul continues to assume, as he had in 1 Thessalonians, that he will be among the living when the Lord returns.

Finally, let us return to the question of the resurrection of Jesus in Paul’s view. He had seen the Lord (1 Cor. 9:1). What did he see? It seems quite clear that whatever he saw, he thought that “spiritual body,” and “not of flesh and blood” were appropriate descriptions. The argument of verses 48–50 is decisive: living people, like Adam, are made of dust. Believers, however, will be like the man of heaven: “we will also bear the image of the man of heaven . . . Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.” Therefore the Jesus whom Paul saw was a “man of heaven,” “not of flesh and blood.” As one student put it,

Paul’s understanding of the form of the raised body is . . . derived from his having seen Christ resurrected. If Paul had truly seen Christ with a physical body, he would certainly have insisted that Christians too would be resurrected with a physical body. But he does not do so, and since it appears that Paul bases his view of the resurrection on his first-hand experience with the raised Christ, we must conclude that Christ had appeared before Paul as an immaterial body and that Paul expected the dead in Christ to assume the same form when resurrected.³³

32. I am grateful to Greg Kaden for emphasizing the importance of noting when Paul uses the first and when the third person when speaking of those who live or those who are dead when the Lord returns.

33. Greg Kaden, “The Eschatology of Paul,” term paper, Duke University, 1992 (quoted with permission).

I do not wish to go too far astray from our topic, but this will be puzzling or troubling to many who have learned that they should believe in the resurrection of the flesh—which Paul denies. Therefore I should note that some of the stories of the resurrection in the Gospels are ambiguous about the “fleshliness” of Jesus after the resurrection. According to John 20:11–15, when Mary Magdalene saw Jesus, she did not recognize him and took him to be the gardener. According to Luke 24:13–31, Jesus walked beside and talked to two followers for some time, apparently a few hours, and they recognized him only at the end of the day, when he broke bread. He then vanished, and we learn that he had simultaneously appeared to Simon Peter (24:34). Next, he suddenly appeared to the disciples (24:36). This is followed, to be sure, by his eating (24:42–3), which indicates that he was not a “ghost,” in Greek a “spirit” (*pneuma*) (24:37, 39). But we would also have to say that these stories do not claim that he was just the same old Jesus. The same old Jesus could not vanish and reappear whenever and wherever he wished, and the same old Jesus would have been immediately recognized by his followers. Thus Paul’s view of the resurrected body was not entirely different from some of the descriptions in the Gospels.

The ancient world knew about resuscitated corpses (people who appeared to be dead, but who got up and walked around), and also about ghosts, shadowy presences that appear in dreams or late at night and resemble someone who had died.³⁴ Paul and Luke, in different ways, wished to say that the risen Jesus was neither. He was something different and new. Paul hit upon the term “spiritual body,” not a ghost or spirit, but also not a body of flesh and blood. I do not pretend to know what Paul and the disciples “really” experienced; I can only describe the texts that survive. But it is a mistake to think

34. On resuscitated corpses and ghosts see further Sanders, *Historical Figure of Jesus*, 277–78 and notes (311–12). I am indebted for this point to Margaret Davies.

that early Christians thought that the risen Lord was either a badly wounded man staggering around or a ghostly apparition. They seem to have thought that he was neither, but (in Paul's terms) the "first fruits" of the coming transformation called "the resurrection" (1 Cor. 15:20–23).

It may be useful to repeat that I am aware that our discussion of Gen. 2:7 in 1 Cor. 15:42–47 will be difficult for readers who are not accustomed to studying foreign languages. Readers of the RSV or the NRSV read in 15:44 that "it is sown a physical body" instead of "sown a soulish body," and they also find "physical" in verse 46. In 15:45 they read that "Adam became a living being" instead of "living soul." The NIV has "natural body" in verse 44, "living being" in verse 45, and "natural" in verse 46. It is confusing to be told that Paul wrote "soul" or the adjective I have coined, "soulish," in these verses. The only comfort I can offer is that translation is a difficult job and that translators think that it is confusing to try to teach the reader about ancient exegesis by way of mere translation. So I have undertaken to explain what Paul was doing in these verses and why he was doing it. I hope I have not made a bad situation worse.

Other translations have taken different paths. The NEB has "sown as an animal body" instead of "soulish body" in 15:44; "animate being" instead of "living soul" in verse 45; "animal body" instead of "soulish" in verse 46. Of the major translations, the only one that translates *psychē* and *psychikos* as "soul" in these three verses is the JB, which I shall print in parallel with a literal translation and thus conclude the discussion of 1 Corinthians 15:

JB

⁴⁴when it is sown it embodies the soul, when it is raised it embodies the spirit. If the soul has its own embodiment, so does the spirit have its own embodiment. ⁴⁵The first *man*, Adam, as scripture says, *became a living soul*; but the last Adam has become a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶That is, first the one with the soul, not the spirit, and after that, the one with the spirit.

Literal

⁴⁴it is sown a soulish body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a soulish body, there is a spiritual body. ^{45a}The [first] man [Adam] became a living soul." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶But the first is not the spiritual but the soulish, then the spiritual.

The Corinthian Correspondence, Part 6: Resurrection and the Future in 2 Corinthians 3—5 and Later Letters

Introduction

In this chapter I shall introduce passages from letters other than 1 and 2 Corinthians that deal with the resurrection and eschatology. Each of these passages will be separately considered in its place, but we shall benefit if we can compare and contrast what Paul says in one place with what he says in another.

We shall begin by defining two terms that apply to what Paul says about the resurrection in 2 Corinthians, which is appreciably different from 1 Corinthians 15 and requires a small amount of new vocabulary.

Realized Eschatology

“Realized eschatology” is the belief that some of the events that are usually expected at the end of days (the *eschaton*) are occurring in the present or have recently occurred in the past. This belief is clearest in the Gospel of John, for example John 4:23, where Jesus says, “the time is coming and *now has come* when the true worshippers will worship the father in truth [my emphasis].” Or John 12:31: “Now is the time for the judgment of this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.” Some scholars have changed the term to “eschatology in the process of being realized,” and this suits very well the passages in Paul’s letters that we shall consider.

Cosmic Dualism

We saw earlier, in chapter fourteen, that many or most Greek-speakers believed in body/soul dualism—an immortal soul is locked into a body that will decay, and at death the soul is liberated. The body need not be considered as *evil*, but it is obviously inferior to the soul. We noted that this common form of dualism can be called “individual dualism” or “inner/outer dualism” and also that there was another kind of dualism: cosmic dualism. I now wish to consider dualism of all types more generally and describe cosmic dualism more precisely.

“Dualism” in general refers to various systems of belief in two opposing powers or natures in the universe. Dualism is more complicated than realized eschatology and was also a lot more important in Paul’s world. It will require a substantial explanation.

Dualism of one kind or other is very common as a way of accounting for the *coexistence of good and evil* in the world. There are good and bad things about life, good and bad people, good and bad

aspects within each one of us, and so on. Does this mean that there are two competing powers in the world: one good, one bad?

There were a few ways of explaining evil that were not dualistic. I shall briefly describe two of them. The Stoics were *monists*, holding that everything was part of the same, good whole. “God” and “nature” were synonymous. According to this view, things that people call bad are not really bad if seen in the broader context. A flood or an earthquake is really just a part of nature, which is good; if the earth were not living and moving, it would be dead and we would not exist at all. If one looks at the larger view, everything is as it should be, and everything is good. Stoicism was a fairly rarified philosophy, and most people carried on thinking that good and evil coexisted in the world.

Classical Judaism was *monotheistic*, and Jews believed that the one good and loving God controlled everything—both nature and human events. Human suffering and natural calamities alike were “acts of God,” and they were purposeful. Ordinarily they were seen as divine retribution for sin: God chose his people and gave them many good gifts. They, however, rebelled against him and sinned. He punished them, for example, by causing a foreign enemy to destroy their country. They repented, and God restored their original blessings to them.

This explanation was not always adequate. Sometimes it was the most righteous who suffered the most (as in the book of Job). Nevertheless, divine punishment remained the only real “solution” to evil and unhappiness that pure monotheism had to offer.

This severe doctrine was ameliorated by belief in the world to come. In the next world, the accounts would be squared: deserved punishment and rewards that were not meted out in life would be bestowed at the time of death or in the world to come.

We shall now see that there were, however, Jews who accounted

for evil by accepting some form of dualism. This avoided attributing evil to God.¹ To protect the view that there was only one real God, Jews who accepted dualistic elements made them ultimately subordinate to God.

Despite the prevalence of monotheistic thinking in the Hebrew Bible and postbiblical Judaism, some Jews thought that there were “two powers in heaven” (as later Jews put it), one good and one bad.² With this as a starting point, bad events and bad people could be explained as being under the influence of the bad god or power. This form of dualism was basically Persian, but aspects of it were accepted in some Jewish circles, and it influenced early Christianity as well.³ One of the Dead Sea Scrolls is called “The War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness”: good people (the sectarians) belonged to God, who was associated with light, but others belonged to the power of evil, personified as the Angel of Darkness.

Jews (and later, Christians) seldom granted that they believed in two *Gods*, but many of them believed in two powers, such as God and Satan, or God and the Angel of Darkness.⁴

Cosmic dualism was often worked out *chronologically*: the power of evil was more often than not in charge of the present world, but the good God would one day defeat it. This age is bad, but a good age will come.

1. See further below. On the suffering of the righteous in postbiblical Jewish literature, see E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 170–72, 390–91, 302–5.
2. See Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1977).
3. On Zoroastrian dualism and its influence on Judaism, see Mary Boyce, “Persian Religion in the Achaemenid Age,” in *Cambridge History of Judaism*, ed. W. D. Davis and Louis Finkelstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 1:283f.; Shaul Shaked, “Iranian Influence on Judaism: First Century B.C.E. to Second Century C.E.,” in *Cambridge History of Judaism*, 1:214–16.
4. English translations of the *War Scroll* include Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 161–86; Michael Wise et al., *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (London: HarperCollins, 1996), 150–72.

We noted above that individual dualism (body/soul) did not necessarily imply that the body is evil. It may be only second best. But the history of Platonism shows that this can be a slippery slope. First one proposes that pleasures of the flesh should be enjoyed only moderately, so as not to distract the inner person from contemplating the good, the true, and the beautiful. Then one proposes that pleasures of the flesh should be avoided: sex is only for procreation, not for pleasure. It is a short step to the view that the physical body is *evil*, while only the interior immortal soul is good. (On the anti-flesh and anti-pleasure form of body/soul dualism, which partially penetrated Christianity, see appendix I, pp. 727–47).

These two kinds of dualism (individual and cosmic) can be and sometimes were combined: the evil power in heaven is in charge of the evil body; the interior soul is fixed on the good God and can hardly wait to escape the body.

In general, Judaism is fundamentally against dualism, though some forms of Judaism accepted some forms of dualism. But at the root of Judaism is the belief that there is only one true God, who is good, and who created the world, declaring it to be good too (e.g., Gen. 1:31). Christianity inherited this view, and the Jewish view of creation helped it fight off some of the worst aspects of dualism (especially the denigration of bodily pleasure), though it also accepted some. The battle between dualism and monotheism went on for centuries, and it resulted in a stalemate; to this day there is no final solution of the problem. Many, many Christians are monotheists who accept the existence of evil powers, such as Satan, though maintaining that finally God will conquer them.

Dualism in Paul's Letters

Before discussing aspects of Paul's view of the resurrection and the future life, we may note that Paul was a monotheist whose

monotheism included more than minor elements of cosmic dualism. The pages of his letters are peppered with references to evil spiritual powers. A few examples are 1 Cor. 15:24–25 (Christ will destroy “every ruler and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet”), and 2 Cor. 11:14 (“Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light”). The most striking case of cosmic/chronological dualism is this: “the *god of this world* [literally, *age*] has blinded the minds of the unbelievers” (2 Cor. 4:4). Here Paul actually uses “god” for the power of evil.

Moreover, in Paul’s later letters there are instances in which human flesh itself is depicted as the home of sin. This will become important especially in Romans 7 and 8.

Now we turn to passages related to the resurrection and the future life.

Second Corinthians 3–5

Second Corinthians 3:18–5:10 is among those that most forcefully raise the issue of the growth, development, or movement of Paul’s thought. It includes elements of *ongoing inner transformation*, which we do not see in 1 Thessalonians or 1 Corinthians.

This concept of the Christian’s transformation is quite different from the transformation described in 1 Cor. 15:52, which happens at the time of the general resurrection, “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.” The two are not contradictory, since there could be two sorts of transformation, or two stages of transformation, but they are different.

Moreover, 2 Cor. 3:18–5:10 and other passages show the influence of inner/outer (or individual) *dualism* in Paul’s thought. We recall that in 1 Corinthians 15 he forcefully rejected body/soul dualism. Now he will seem to embrace it.

First we note that the idea of resurrection in general, and in 1 Corinthians 15, belongs in the framework of cosmic/chronological dualism. In the present age, while the good God and the evil power contend for control, lots of bad things happen, but in the end the good God will win; he will destroy the evil power or powers, and he will raise people and punish or reward them—as in 1 Cor. 15:24–26. Moreover, an aspect of this view is explicitly stated at the end of the present passage, 2 Cor. 5:10: “For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil.” This judgment assumes that Christ has destroyed the enemy powers, or at least rendered them inoperative.

Other passages in 2 Cor. 3:18–5:10, however, do not conform to this original and simple form of cosmic/chronological dualism (the evil power rules this age, but not the age to come).

This passage is part of the letter of relief or reconciliation, which Paul sent to Corinth after Titus returned with the good news that the congregation was still loyal to Paul. Thus he wanted to conciliate the members of his church and to accommodate their views as far as his conscience would allow.

Within the letter of relief, Paul cannot help but go back over some of the old ground; one such topic is the resurrection. The precise boundaries of the passage are harder to set than is the case with 1 Corinthians 15, and one could well begin with 4:7 rather than 3:18, but 3:18 has a theme that we should include. I shall also quote one verse that comes after 5:10. Three topics are interwoven in this discussion: (1) transformation in the present or “realized eschatology”; (2) differences from 1 Corinthians 15; (3) continuities with 1 Corinthians 15. I shall summarize these topics in the conclusion of the section.

Transformation in the Present

In this section of 2 Corinthians, Paul emphasizes that the anticipated future rewards of Christianity are already underway. There are four principal verses, which I shall quote with brief comments after each.

- a. All of us . . . are being transformed into the same image [as that of the Lord or Spirit, v. 17] from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit. (2 Cor. 3:18)

The verb “are being transformed” is present passive; the understood actor is God: we are being transformed by God now. The Greek verb is different from “we shall be changed” in 1 Cor. 15:51–52, though the idea is the same. “Transformed into the same image” recalls “we shall bear the image of the man of heaven” in 1 Cor. 15:49. And “from one degree of glory to another” reminds us of the discussion of different glories in 1 Cor. 15:40–41, especially “the glory of the heavenly is one thing, and that of the earthly is another.” Thus in 2 Cor. 3:18, Paul is recalling 1 Corinthians 15.

In 1 Cor. 15:51, however, the verb *change* is future, and the verb that goes with *image* is also future (15:49). What Paul depicts as entirely future in 1 Corinthians 15 becomes partly present in 2 Cor. 3:18. Transformation to the heavenly glory is underway.

- b. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. (2 Cor. 4:16)

The verb “being renewed” is again present passive: our inner nature is being renewed daily by God. But even more notable is the fact that Paul distinguishes the “outer person” from the “inner.” This sounds very much like body/soul dualism.

This impression is strengthened by the third verse:

c. We look not at what can be seen, for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal. (2 Cor. 4:18)

That is, the inner self is eternal, the outer self passes away. This sentence constitutes what I call “Paul’s most platonic moment”: Platonic theory held that the eternal “forms” are *real*, while their “shadows” or “imitations,” which are perceived by the human senses, are not real. What can be destroyed is not real; what is real cannot be destroyed.⁵ Again, this suggests body/soul dualism.

d. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! (2 Cor. 5:17)

This requires virtually no comment. The creation, which in Rom. 8:19–23 is groaning as it awaits redemption, has here already been renewed. The old has passed away.

In these four verses, Paul moves into the present what is otherwise future. As is often the case with realized eschatology, the presence of end-time events, or the beginning of transformation to a body like Christ’s, cannot be demonstrated empirically. No one could see that Paul and the other Christians were being transformed into the image of Christ, changed from one degree of glory to the other (2 Cor. 3:18). Probably their faces kept getting older and more wrinkled. The transformation was of the inner person, not the outer (4:16).

Then what does it mean to say that they were being *transformed* into *the image* of the Lord (3:18)? The word *image* implies that the transformation is visible. Paul does not work this out. Logically, he should have spoken only of the present transformation of the inner person. Spiritual enthusiasm, however, which Paul and the Corinthians shared, leads people to perceive *in themselves* that they

5. On soul, body, and what is immortal, see, for example, Plato, *Phaedo*, 80c: “The soul is most like that which is divine, immortal . . . indissoluble . . . and invariable, whereas body is most like that which is human, mortal . . . dissoluble, and . . . never self-consistent.”

are new people, full of power and perceptions that they had not previously had. It also sometimes leads to hyperbole.

Paul always thought that Christians have *something* in the present that marks their conversion. Most frequently he speaks of the Spirit as the present gift of God, as in 1 Thess. 4:8. And, of course, during his founding visit in Corinth he had told his converts that they would have gifts of the Spirit, such as speaking in tongues (above, pp. 264; 276–78). It is, nevertheless, striking that in this section of 2 Corinthians he emphasizes the present transformation of Christians so strongly, using the very words that he elsewhere puts in the future. We cannot be sure why he did this, though I shall offer two suggestions.

1. The first is that the Corinthians wanted more emphasis on present spiritual riches. To see this, we go back to 1 Cor. 4:8, where he wrote satirically about the Corinthians for thinking that they already had it all:

Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Quite apart from us you have become kings! Indeed, I wish that you had become kings, so that we might be kings with you!

In 1 Corinthians, Paul thought that he had to rebuke this attitude of already having the spiritual gifts of the future, which doubtless accompanied their emphasis on the showiest spiritual gift (speaking in tongues). This need to suppress excessive spiritual enthusiasm may have been a minor contributing factor to the strong futuristic emphasis in 1 Corinthians 15. After the difficulties that he and the Corinthians had, however, when he wrote the letter of relief (2 Cor. 1–9) he may have wished to redress the balance by emphasizing the present renewal, which seems to have been a theme that they liked.

2. The second possible explanation of the strong emphasis on present transformation in 2 Corinthians is that Paul himself may

have been feeling the difficulty of the delay of the *parousia*. In 1 Thessalonians, believers simply hang on, work hard, live perfectly, endure persecution, and wait. Their reward is on the way. In 2 Corinthians, on the other hand, they are being transformed in the present. In 1 Cor. 15:53–54, the mortal body must put on immortality in the future; in 2 Cor. 4:11, “while we live” the “life of Jesus” is being made “visible in our mortal bodies” (though this may refer only to Paul himself).

As time went on, Paul probably more and more felt the need for believers, including himself, to have greater spiritual riches in the present, as compensation for the delay. I do not mean that he calculated the issue in this way; it was probably a spontaneous move. But it is striking that present transformation enters his letters in 2 Corinthians, and remains through the last letter, Romans, while discussion of the *parousia* fades into fairly brief reminders. Later in this chapter, we shall see Paul’s conception of the indwelling Spirit or union with Christ in the present in Philipppians and Romans.

Differences between 1 Corinthians 15 and 2 Corinthians 3–5

We have already mentioned the first major difference: in 2 Cor. 3:18–5:17, the transformation of Christians is presently happening; in 1 Corinthians 15, the transformation is future. We have also had a preliminary look at the second main difference: inner/outer dualism (2 Cor. 4:16, quoted above). We shall now explore this theme.

In 2 Cor. 4:16, Paul continues to show himself ready to employ individual body/soul dualism. He still will not use the word *soul* for the inner person, but he does distinguish “the outer person,” which is passing away, from “the inner person,” which is “being renewed.”

Individual dualism also dominates 2 Cor. 5:1–9. Paul states that “we” live in an “earthly tent.” There is also a “house not made with

hands, eternal in the heavens” (5:1). “We groan” for this, “longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling” (5:2). Here the real human being (“we”) is the “inner person.” What is the body? A tent. The real person—the inner person—lives inside the outer tent and wishes to discard it. Paul then briefly considers what happens at death. We recall that in 1 Corinthians 15 he said that the dead, like the living, would be changed all at once, at the last trumpet. There, the soul is not “parked” somewhere, waiting to be reunited with the body. But now he contemplates the possibility that the inner, real person, may be briefly *naked*, without a body/tent as covering:

For in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling—if indeed, when we have taken it off we will not be found naked. (5:2-3)

He promptly, however, rejects the uncomfortable thought of a naked inner person:

For while we are still in this tent, we groan under our burden, because we wish not to be unclothed but to be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. (5:4)

This accepts the dualistic view that the outer shell is not a good dwelling; “we groan under our burden.” But he rejects the standard Greek idea of disembodied souls carrying on a weak existence. The real (inner) person will not be unclothed, but rather be further clothed, swallowed up by life. This statement takes us back to 1 Cor. 15:53-54: “This perishable body must *put on* imperishability . . . then the saying . . . will be fulfilled, ‘Death has been *swallowed up* in victory.’”

In 2 Cor. 5:8, however, Paul once more raises the possibility of a bodiless person: “we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.” “We” is again the real person, who can do

without the body and be with the Lord. This is different from putting an immortal body on over the mortal body (cf. also Phil. 1:23).

The formulation of 2 Cor. 5:8 will eventually become standard in Christianity: when someone dies, the “real” person goes to heaven, while the body decays. In the present passage, this has not yet happened. On the contrary, “we would rather be away from the body” (5:8) is probably still governed by “longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling” (5:2); if so, this “longing” or deep-seated wish to be away from the body and with the Lord does not require us to think that Paul has now shifted to a new doctrine, that the inner person goes to heaven at death. He probably is, however, beginning to *feel the attraction* of that view (we would *rather* be away from the body). (On Paul’s feelings, see immediately below.)

We have thus far seen two substantial differences between 2 Cor. 3:18–5:10 and 1 Corinthians 15: (a) In 2 Corinthians, Paul emphasizes transformation in the present; (b) he distinguishes a real, inner person from the outer shell, showing the influence of body/soul dualism.

I wish to offer some further reflections on inner/outer dualism in Paul’s thought. It would be too much to say, even if we read only 2 Cor. 5:1–9, that Paul definitely accepted this form of dualism. The discussion of the whole person as being “further clothed” and “swallowed” in 5:4 shows that he is not prepared to give up the view that the entire person, body and all, will be transformed—despite the implication of 2 Cor. 4:16 and 4:18. The words *further clothed* and *swallowed* show that he has not made a definite change to inner/outer dualism. Rather, he knows the language and finds it useful for his immediate purposes.

But what are these purposes? What has motivated Paul to use the language of inner/outer dualism? Above we asked why Paul emphasized “realized eschatology” in 2 Corinthians, and one of the

answers was that the Corinthians liked it. The same answer applies here. In discussing 1 Corinthians 15, I proposed that the Corinthians' rejection of the resurrection of bodies was probably based on the common Greek view that a person is an immortal soul within a mortal body, and that only the soul can live forever. Paul's discussion of the inner person in 2 Cor. 4:16, 18, and related statements in 5:1-8, show at least partial acceptance of this view. In the letter of reconciliation, where he was celebrating the restoration of good relations with the Corinthians, Paul wanted to embrace their positions at least to a limited degree. I am sure that they were pleased to read that the inner person is being renewed and that the outer person is merely a tent, a temporary abode.

There is a second explanation, an autobiographical explanation, and perhaps it is more important. This rests on the third substantial difference between 1 Corinthians 15 and the present passages in 2 Corinthians.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul places himself with those who may die before the Lord returns. In 1 Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians, Paul had used "we" (the first person) when speaking of those who will still be alive (1 Thess. 4:15, 17; 1 Cor. 15:51f.) and the second or third person when speaking of those who die and will be raised: "*We* who are alive" and "*Those* who have fallen asleep" (1 Thess. 4:15-17; 1 Cor. 15:52). In 2 Corinthians, however, he uses "we" when speaking of those who die. Thus in 2 Cor. 5:1 he considers what happens if the "earthly tent" in which *we* live is destroyed. In 2 Cor. 5:8 he states that *we* would rather be with the Lord, and in 2 Cor. 4:14 he expresses his confidence that God "will raise *us* also with Jesus and will bring us with you into his presence."

In all these passages in 2 Corinthians, the first person plural is connected with those who die before the Lord returns. It appears that Paul has begun to think that the Lord may not return within his

lifetime. There is nothing in the correspondence thus far to make us believe that he has pondered the question and finally decided to move himself from the group of those who would still be alive when the Lord returned to those who would be dead. It is far more probable that this change was unconscious, which to my mind makes it more poignant.

I now am going to speculate a little on Paul's emotional state. We cannot, of course, know his mood and feelings, but it would be callous to ignore the tone of different parts of his letters.

The last year or so had been hard on Paul. The Corinthian rebellion against his authority was painful and difficult to bear. It is also likely that the crisis in Galatia overlapped with the crisis in Corinth.⁶ The statement that "we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling" (2 Cor. 5:2) may show that he is tiring and beginning to feel that he may not see the day of the Lord.

Two lists of afflictions in 2 Corinthians point in the direction of weariness, including weariness of life. The earlier, more combative list appears in 2 Cor. 11:23–29 (above, pp. 252–53). The second list, which we have not discussed, is in 4:7–12. In this passage, the repeated references to "our" death (we are "carrying in the body the death of Jesus"; we are "always being given up to death for Jesus' sake"; "death is at work in us," 4:10–12) indicate a somberness of mood and consciousness of death even in this section of 2 Corinthians, where Paul is rejoicing that his harsh letter and Titus's visit saved the situation.

6. Gerd Lüdemann, *Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles: Studies in Chronology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 263, puts the bad news from Galatia and Titus's trip to Corinth to deliver the harsh letter in the same year (51 or 53 CE). During this period Paul was also worrying about the collection of money for Jerusalem. Similarly Gregory Tatum (*New Chapters in the Life of Paul: The Relative Chronology of His Career*, Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series 41 [Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2006], chaps. 3 and 4) argues that Galatians was written between 2 Corinthians 10–13 and 2 Corinthians 1–9, thus putting it near the worst part of the Corinthian crisis.

Further passages (2 Cor. 4:1, 16; 5:6, “we do not lose heart”; “we are always confident”) also lead to the view that the passage of time is weighing on him. Why does he have to repeat “we do not lose heart” (4:1, 16)? Surely because he was finding it hard to keep from doing so. “We would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord” (5:8, cf. 5:6) points in the same direction. How much better to think that when he dies he can leave this mortal shell and be with Christ immediately! This will be clearer after we discuss Philippians, and I shall return to it immediately below.

In short, I suspect that the thought that he himself might die before the Lord returned helps to account for the incidences of soul/body dualism that we have noted. This probably made him realize how wretched it would be to be told that “if you die before the Lord returns, you will wait in the grave until the Day” (the implication of his view in 1 Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians). If he dies, he can only think that he will immediately be with the Lord.

Continuities Between 1 Corinthians 15 and 2 Corinthians 3–5

We have already seen the principal agreements between 2 Corinthians and 1 Corinthians 15, and we need only recall them. (a) The discussion of putting on and swallowing in 2 Cor. 5:4 is based on 1 Cor. 15:53–54; (b) “transformed into the same image” (2 Cor. 3:18) recalls “we shall bear the image of the man of heaven” in 1 Cor. 15:49; (c) “from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor. 3:18) reminds us of the discussion of different glories in 1 Cor. 15:40–41, especially “the glory of the heavenly is one thing, and that of the earthly is another.” (d) In 2 Cor. 4:14, Paul repeats that “the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus.” Except for the use of the first person, this is what he wrote to the Thessalonians and earlier to the Corinthians. The resurrection of dead believers is based on the resurrection of Jesus and will unite them with him.

We have only a few passages left, and I shall present them before offering conclusions.

Philippians

When he wrote Philippians, Paul was in prison. When and where he was imprisoned are uncertain, but Paul probably wrote the letter before Romans and after Galatians and 2 Corinthians. Philippians contains several passages relevant to our present topics (1:23–24; 2:16–17; 3:10–11; 3:20–21).

The Return of the Lord and the Future of Believers

In Phil. 3:20–21, we find a prediction that is very much like 1 Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians 15. In this passage Paul repeats his view of the return of Jesus and the transformation of believers at the time of his return.

Our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself. (Phil. 3:20–21)

In this brief reminder of what he had taught the Philippians, he does not distinguish those who will still be alive from the dead. He does, however, repeat some of the earlier terminology. “[H]eaven . . . from which we expect a savior” in Phil. 3:20 is similar to “we await his Son from heaven” in 1 Thess. 1:10; “will transform” (the future tense) in 3:21 recalls 1 Cor. 15:51–52 (though the Greek verb is different)⁷; “the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself” (3:21) reminds us of 1 Cor. 15:26–28.

7. The three verbs translated “change” or “transform” in 1 Cor. 15:51–52; 2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 3:21 are all different from one another.

Most importantly, the transformation of the “*body* of our humiliation” so that it conforms to “the *body* of his glory” (3:21) reveals that he is thinking of bodies, not “inner persons,” and that he still thinks that raised believers will be given the same kind of body as the raised Jesus—a body of glory (cf. 1 Cor. 15:40). There is no hint in these two verses of present transformation or of soul/body dualism. Thus, on this point, Phil. 3:20–21 is fundamentally the same as 1 Corinthians 15.

In the other passages on the future in Philippians, however, we can see that Paul was quite consciously considering the possibility of his own death. In 2:16–17 he says that he may be “poured out as a libation.” As in 2 Corinthians 5, in some ways he desires death:

For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which I prefer. I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better, but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. (Phil. 1:21–23)

When thinking of his death, he naturally thought of himself, that is, the “real person,” as leaving the earthly body and going immediately to be with Christ (1:23). Here, as in 2 Corinthians 5, there is an inner person that might leave the flesh, or earthly tent, to be with Christ. We also see in this passage the theme of union with Christ in this life: “living is Christ.”

In 3:10–21, while still considering death, he reverts to the language of resurrection: “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”

Here, as in 2 Cor. 4:14, he speaks of the resurrection in the first person, and this time it is the first person singular. The possibility that he will soon die may be on his mind.

The Future of Unbelievers

Philippians 3:18–19 is one of the few passages where Paul comments directly on the fate of non-Christians:

Many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things.

Paul contrasts Christ's enemies with "us," those whose citizenship is in heaven, from which Christ will return (3:20). Similarly in Phil. 1:28 he refers to the destruction of the Philippians' enemies, and in Rom. 9:22 he describes God's patience with "the objects of wrath that are made for destruction." One passage seems to put the destruction of unbelievers on the "day of wrath," when God gives eternal life to some and metes out to others "wrath and fury" (Rom. 2:5–8). Wrath and fury, to be sure, are not necessarily the same as destruction, though they might be.

In any case, whenever and however the wicked are destroyed, in the extant letters Paul never mentions a bad place to which non-Christians go, nor does he say anything about eternal postmortem torments. In chapter 22 we shall compare these dire predictions of destruction with passages in which Paul envisages the triumph of God and the salvation of all (e.g., Rom. 11:32).

Summary of Passages in Philippians on the Future

In this letter, Paul is thinking of his own death; in this mood he thinks of leaving and being with Christ (as in 2 Cor.), apparently immediately; he nevertheless looks forward both to the return of Christ and the resurrection (as in 1 Cor. 15); yet even in the present

he has the sort of union with Christ that allows him to say that for him to live is Christ.

Romans

In Romans, Paul's last surviving letter, the return of the Lord and the resurrection of the dead are not major topics, but there are some relevant passages (Rom. 6:5; 8:18-30; 13:11-12). First of all, we note that Paul has by no means surrendered the view that the decisive event lies in the near future:

You know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. (Rom. 13:11-12)

In Rom. 6:5, Paul refers to having been united with Christ in death and therefore also sharing his resurrection. This is strongly reminiscent of Phil. 3:10-11 (becoming like him in his death and attaining the resurrection). The context of Rom. 6:5, however, shows that dying with Christ is now a sacramental, mystical death, accomplished in baptism: "we have been buried with him by baptism into death" (6:4; cf. also 6:6-8). Although Phil. 3:10-11 and Rom. 6:5 share the idea of becoming like Christ in death and participating in his resurrection, there is a substantial difference: Phil. 3:10-11 refers to physical death,⁸ while Rom. 6:5 refers to participation in Christ's death through baptism.

Romans 6 is the fullest treatment in Paul's letters of participation in Christ during this life. Believers have already died with Christ, and though they will live with him in the future (6:8), they now walk in "newness of life." In Christ they are alive to God in the present (6:4, 11). We should also note 8:11: "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus

8. Paul's other references to his own death in Philippians make it highly likely that 3:10 also refers to his physical death.

from the dead dwells in you, he . . . will also give life to your mortal bodies through the Spirit that dwells in you.” Although the verb is future, Paul here states that the Spirit gives life to mortal bodies while they are still mortal, before the transformation.

The last passage is Rom. 8:18–30. In 8:17, Paul affirms that we shall be glorified with Christ if we suffer with him (cf. Phil. 3:10–11 on “sharing his sufferings,” his death, and also his resurrection). In 8:18, the glory is about to be revealed. Then comes a striking passage on the created order as a whole:

The creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. (8:19–23)

This remarkable and stirring passage is full of things to be noted, but we shall look only at statements that are most relevant to the present topic, saving the rest until the chapter on Romans.

(a) The creation awaits redemption in the future—it is not the case, as it is in 2 Cor. 5:17, that the old creation has already passed away. Paul describes the present creation as being in a state of subjection and futility; transformation lies entirely in the future (as in 1 Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians).

(b) “We” already have the Spirit as first fruits (8:23). This is a combination of two previous thoughts: all Christians have the Spirit; Christ is the first fruits of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20, 23). In Rom. 8:23 Paul simply combines Spirit and first fruits. Saying that Christians have the Spirit as first fruits is a modest claim about the present when compared to 2 Cor. 3:18. (c) What lies in the future is

“glory” (8:18, 21; cf. 1 Cor. 15:40, 43; 2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 3:21). (d) Our *bodies* will be redeemed in the future, not the present (8:23; cf. 1 Cor. 15; Phil. 3:21).

Later in Romans 8 Paul refers to Christians as being “predestined to be conformed to the image of [God’s] Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family” (8:29). “Conformed” is the same word as in Phil. 3:21, “conformed to the body of his glory.” “Firstborn” is related to “first fruits” in 1 Cor. 15:20, 23 (Christ as “first fruits” of those who have died).⁹ Here, as earlier in Romans 8, substantial transformation lies in the future.

Three aspects of these passages in Romans require further attention. (a) The passages in Romans are unusual in that they make no distinction between the living and the dead. The next two respects, however, indicate that in Romans Paul reverts to the scheme of 1 Thessalonians 4 and 1 Corinthians 15. (b) There is no inner/outer dualism in Romans, which agrees with 1 Thessalonians 4 and 1 Corinthians 15, against 2 Corinthians and Phil. 1:23. (c) The soteriological scheme of Romans 8 is the bipolar contrast of present/future, which in Romans 8 is expressed as futility/redemption. This is like 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4, unlike 2 Cor. 3:18–5:10.

I believe that the main fact behind the first two of these points is that in Romans, Paul was no longer thinking of his own death, either consciously (as in Philippians) or unconsciously (as in 2 Corinthians). In Romans, he does not distinguish at all between those who will be dead when the Lord returns and those who will still be alive. This distinction was forced upon him by events in Thessalonica, and he still took it into account in 1 Corinthians, where he used “we” when discussing those who would still be alive. In 2 Corinthians he seems to have had death on his mind (e.g., 4:10–12), and, perhaps

9. First fruits (*aparchē*) and firstborn (*prōtotokos*) are words for offerings presented to the temple. See Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief* (London: SCM, 1992), 151–52.

unconsciously, he spoke of the dead in the first person (e.g., 4:14). In Philippians his imprisonment made him explicitly consider his own death.

But in Romans, it appears that he has put some of his difficulties behind him: the effect of his arguments with the Corinthians, his fierce debate over circumcision (Galatians, yet to be considered), his own physical hardships, and his imprisonment are receding (though they have not entirely disappeared). Consequently, his optimism about his own career has reemerged. He has in hand the collection for the saints in Jerusalem, and he can contemplate the last stage of his mission, which will take him to Rome and then on to Spain, with confidence and without thinking that perhaps he will die first.

A second factor that may explain why he does not distinguish between the living, who will be changed at the *parousia*, and the dead, who will be raised with new, spiritual bodies, is that by the time he wrote Romans he had for some years been emphasizing that the dead would be raised when the Lord returned, though not surrendering the idea that some people would be alive. Thus the issue that led to the distinction in 1 Thessalonians 4, that some believers were dying, was no longer a problem in his own mind, and his converts were no longer surprised when one of their number died. Resurrection, rather than waiting for the Lord to return, has become the central motif in Paul's thought about eternal life, and the expectation that the *parousia* will be in the lifetime of most believers has cooled. (The return of the Lord is implied in Rom. 2:5; 2:16; 13:11-12.)

The change in mood and tone as a result of the fact that he is no longer thinking of his own death is clearest in Romans 8: he does not give a list of his afflictions anywhere in Romans, though he does refer to them briefly: "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us" (8:18). Later he asks if "hardship, or distress, or persecution,

or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword” will separate “us” from the love of Christ, and he refers again to death: “For your sake we are being killed all day long.” But he immediately presses on to a positive affirmation without dwelling on either his sufferings or the possibility that he will die before the Lord returns: “we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (8:35–39).

It would not be correct to say that between 2 Corinthians and Romans Paul changed his mind about suffering, including his own, and salvation. In both, he and other Christians suffer and will be saved. The *tone* is different. He seems not to be troubled by the possibility of his own death, and even when he thinks of own afflictions (Rom. 8:35–39), the list does not have the sad, tired, almost defeated note that we saw in 2 Cor. 11:23–27 and 2 Cor. 4:8–12. The latter passage ends, “death is at work in us.” In Romans 8, after saying that he is daily “being killed” (Rom. 8:36), he ends on a note of triumph: nothing “will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus” (8:39).

The shifts in Paul’s thinking caused by his perception of the likelihood of his own death are, to repeat, totally speculative. But, once we stop understanding Paul as a thinking machine who cranked out dogmas, we must recognize that he had emotions, just as we all do. It is quite reasonable to think that he sometimes tired, mentally as well as physically, and that the thought of his own death before the Lord returned bothered him.

On the topics of the future and of Christian transformation, Romans lacks the inner/outer dualism of 2 Corinthians and Phil. 1:23, and it is thus more like 1 Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians. We saw above that there are two obvious explanations of the prominence of this theme in 2 Corinthians and Philippians: the Corinthians found it compatible, and Paul went some way toward meeting their view. The thought of his own death taught him the importance of saying

something positive about the status of the person who dies before the return of the Lord.

The second deserves further comment. The idea that if he should die, “he” would leave his body and immediately be with Christ was obviously appealing. I think that when he wrote 1 Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians, he did not achieve enough sympathy for those who died, and their surviving loved ones, to see that an interval between death and joining Christ was painful to contemplate. He did sympathize, and he wrote 1 Thess. 4:13–18 to comfort the bereaved. But he did not yet fully feel the anguish of being told, in effect, that the dead were dead until the resurrection, in the grave for an indefinite period of time; that is, he did not feel it before he started writing about the dead in the first person, at which time he expressed the longing to go and immediately be with Christ (2 Cor. 5:1–8), a longing that is expressed equally forcefully in Phil. 3:10–11.

In Romans, he changed his tactics slightly: he wrote about the future in terms that did not require him to distinguish the living from the dead. I proposed that this may show that the problem posed by the death of his converts (1 Thessalonians) and the possibility of his own death (2 Corinthians and Philippians) was now behind him. And, of course, Rome was not his own church. He probably knew little about it and did not feel called upon to discuss the death of believers there.

The passages in Romans that bear directly on the resurrection do not say that the transformation is already underway, as he had written in 2 Corinthians. We can only guess why this is; my guess is that the fondness of the Corinthians for “realized eschatology”—the idea that the promises of the future were already occurring in the present—led to the unusual statements that Christians are already being transformed (2 Cor. 3:18), that their inner persons are being renewed (4:16), and that the old creation has already passed away

(5:17). In Romans, when he is relieved of the special problems of the Corinthians, he reverts to the bipolar contrast of a not-very-good present with a glorious future, especially when speaking of the creation (Rom. 8:18-23).

In other ways, however, we can see in Romans and Philippians that he had learned to speak of the *present life of Christians* in deeper and warmer terms. I regard this as one of the main achievements of these two letters. Those who have died with Christ “walk in newness of life” in the present (Rom. 6:4), they are now “dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (6:11), and the Spirit gives life to their “mortal bodies” in the present (8:11). Similarly, he wrote in Philippians 1:21 that for him to live “is Christ” (which builds on Gal. 2:20, “Christ lives in me”).

It seems probable that the continuation of the theme of new life in Christ in the present is the result of the *delay of the parousia*. The longer the delay, the more Christians, including Paul, needed to feel that they had a lot already in the present, and in particular that *they were already living with Christ*. This is an enhancement of the theme that Christians have the Spirit, which we find from beginning to end of Paul’s correspondence.

The End of Realized Eschatology

Above, I suggested that special reasons led to the statements that count as “realized eschatology”: “we are being transformed” (2 Cor. 3:18) and “if anyone is in Christ there is a new creation; everything old has passed away” (2 Cor. 5:17). One of the reasons was the desire to make Christians feel better about their present lives. We noted that the message that Christians should be perfect, that they should suffer, and that they should be prepared to lie in their graves until the Lord comes could sound a bit bleak. As a good pastor, Paul encouraged

them not only to hang on and wait but also to realize the inner riches provided by Christian faith: they walk in newness of life, they are dead to sin, and so on (see the previous paragraph).

Realized eschatology did not last long. With regard to human transformation, Philippians and Romans return to the view of 1 Corinthians: the great change will occur at the eschaton. In these later letters, however, Paul found other ways to state the spiritual richness of the present life.

Summary of the Development of Paul's Thoughts about Resurrection and the Future

1. Jesus' resurrection. Prior to his call to be an apostle, Paul already believed in resurrection in general. Then a revelation revealed the risen Jesus to him. The Jesus whom he saw was neither a normal human being, "of flesh and blood," nor a ghost, but a form for which he chose the term *spiritual body*.
2. Jesus' return. Paul expected Jesus to return in the very new future, in accordance with a "word of the Lord" that he quotes in 1 Thess. 4:15-17. He apparently had not taught his earliest converts that they would die and be raised, and they expected to be alive when the Lord returned. When some began dying, Paul explained that the dead in Christ would be raised and those still alive would join them in greeting Christ on his return.

Subsequently, however, Paul realized that *many* believers would die before Jesus returned and would be raised at the *parousia*. He never, as far as we know, surrendered his expectation that the Lord would soon return. But after 1 Thessalonians this motif plays a smaller role than the resurrection of the dead. Paul still expects the return of Jesus in 1 Cor. 15:51f.; 2 Cor. 1:14; 5:10; Phil. 3:20; Rom. 13:11f. The last passage refers to "the day," which contrasts with "the night," but

which also recalls passages on “the day of the Lord,” “the day of wrath” and the like (above, p. 421).

The delay of the return is probably one of the factors that led Paul, in 2 Corinthians and the later letters (Philippians, Romans), to emphasize that in the present believers are already being transformed or that they already live with Jesus.

3. The resurrection of believers. When Paul began emphasizing the future resurrection of believers, another problem arose. The Corinthians doubted that they would be raised, probably because they knew that bodies decay. They also probably believed that they had immortal souls: they believed in the afterlife, but not in the resurrection of dead bodies. Paul proposed that there are both earthly and heavenly bodies. Humans share with Adam earthly bodies (which Paul, following Gen. 2:7, called “soulish bodies”), but when the Lord returned, both the living and the dead would be transformed; they would have “spiritual bodies,” like Jesus’ resurrection body (1 Cor. 15).

By the time Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, he seems to have begun to think of himself as one of the believers who would die and be raised, not one who would still be alive when the Lord returned. This is probably the main reason he wrote that he longed to leave the mortal “tent” and be clothed with his heavenly dwelling (2 Cor. 5:2). Whatever the reason, in some passages in 2 Corinthians he employs inner/outer dualism, rather than maintaining that the entire person would be changed “in the twinkling of an eye” when the Lord returned (1 Cor. 15:52). It is also probable that the Corinthians felt at home with this form of dualism, and Paul wanted to respond favorably to their preferences as far as he could.

In 2 Corinthians 3–5, Paul also introduced some aspects of “realized

eschatology”—the transformation of Christians was already underway and they already lived with Christ. This “realized eschatology” may also have been partly motivated by the fact that the Corinthians found this emphasis to be compatible with their own views and desires. But it is more likely that realized eschatology was a response to the delay of the *parousia*. His converts may have been tired of waiting. They needed some of the results of their conversion *now*. It is quite possible that Paul shared their feelings.

Because of his disputes with his converts, his years of hard work, and his woes, he may also have felt the need for the same sort of inner feeling of transformation and life with Christ that his converts desired, and he probably joined his converts in not wanting to lie in the grave until the Lord returned.

Despite the inner/outer dualism and realized eschatology in parts of 2 Corinthians, however, in 2 Cor. 4:14 he repeats his expectation that the dead would be raised to be with Jesus. In Philippians, this expectation is also repeated, though he explicitly discusses the possibility of his own death—which again leads him to speak of leaving and being with Christ, apparently immediately after death (Phil. 1:23).

In Romans, his mood is more optimistic, and he seems no longer to be thinking of his own death. He speaks of the bondage of the universe to decay and states that it will be freed of this bondage when the bodies of believers are redeemed (8:18–25). Inner/outer dualism has disappeared, and Paul still expects the “day” to arrive in the very near future (13:11f.).

Summary of Paul’s Core Beliefs about Resurrection and the Future

Of first importance were the resurrection of Jesus, whom he had seen; the return of the Lord; and the transformation of believers, both the

living and the dead, when the Lord returned. He did not project a future for non-believers. "Their end is destruction" (Phil. 3:19). His basic view of ultimate salvation was that the bodies of believers would be transformed; in other words, the whole person would be saved. He knew of the standard Greek view that humans are made of body and soul (real person and external covering, inner person and outer person), and he found this attractive whenever he had to put himself in the camp of those who would die and be raised. But he did not work out a systematic combination of immortal soul and subsequent bodily resurrection, for example, by saying that the soul went to heaven until the resurrection, at which time it would be reunited with a transformed body.

I believe that it will be obvious to most people that we cannot call each of Paul's statements about the future a *doctrine*. His incursions into body/soul dualism and realized eschatology are not entirely compatible with his usual views. He had a fertile mind, too fertile to be contained by hard and fast statements on each and every topic. The present chapter shows very well that when God called him to be an apostle to the gentiles, he did not command him to create systematic dogma.

We can, however, point out his main views on resurrection. These are the views with which he starts in 1 Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians, and to which he returns in Romans.

His main view of the destiny of humans who were in Christ was *transformation of the whole person* when the Lord returned. When circumstances made it attractive, however, he also used the idea of an inner person that could separate from the outer person, just as he could sometimes move the expectation of a future event into the present.

The Corinthian Correspondence, Part 7: The Collection for Jerusalem

Introduction

This brief chapter on 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 deals with a matter of great importance to Paul and his ministry. These chapters depict Paul's effort to raise money on behalf of the "saints" in Judea.¹ Thus 2 Corinthians 8:4, "sharing in this ministry to the saints" and 2 Corinthians 9:1, "it is not necessary for me to write you about the ministry to the saints." The word *ministry* is *diakonia*, best translated "service."² The "saints in Judea" are the Christians in Jerusalem and environs.

Since both letters assume the restoration of good relations between

1. The word translated "saints" is the plural of *hagios*, which is more often translated "holy": therefore, "holy ones." English owes "saint" to the Latin *sanctus*, via French; "holy, hallowed," and so on are from Old English. "Holy" and "saint" are synonyms.
2. The distinctiveness of these two chapters led the editors of the *Hermeneia* commentary series to dedicate a separate volume to them: Hans Dieter Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985).

Paul and the Corinthians that we see in 2 Corinthians 1–7, we may assume that Paul wrote both letters after he wrote the letter of relief. In this case, chapters 8 and 9 are in the correct chronological order, though that was probably not the reason the editor put them where he did. Rather, they conclude the pleasant part of 2 Corinthians and are followed by the angry letter (2 Cor. 10–13), which he demoted to last place.

The broad chronology of events was this: (a) Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, which includes the first surviving reference to the collection for the saints (1 Cor. 16:1–4, discussed below). (b) Paul gradually learned the severity of the crisis in Corinth and, of course, dropped the issue of the collection. (c) His harsh letter and Titus's visit to Corinth repaired the breach. (d) He wrote the letter of relief (2 Cor. 1–7). (e) He picked up the issue of the collection again and wrote chapters 8 and 9. (f) The collection was successful; Paul went to Corinth, wrote to Rome, and then sailed for Jerusalem, money in hand (discussed below).

Because each of the two letters deals with the topic of the collection as a fresh subject, they must have been written on separate occasions. If so, we do not know which came first or how long after 2 Corinthians 1–7 each letter was written. Possibly either chapter 8 or chapter 9 originally followed chapter 7, while the other was a separate letter or part of a separate letter. Or perhaps both 8 and 9 were separate letters. I do not see any way of settling the chronological order of these two letters.

The money-raising activity is explained in Gal. 2:7–10, where Paul describes a council of reconciliation between himself and the leaders of the Christian movement in Jerusalem, which followed a dispute over whether or not Paul's gentile converts should be circumcised and become Jewish. We briefly noted this occasion above (pp. 86–87), and we shall examine the controversy in the chapters on

Galatians. Here I note that the council decided that Paul would go to the gentiles and Peter to the Jews, which apparently meant that each was free in his own domain. This agreement was sealed by Paul's consent to the suggestion of the Jerusalem "pillars" that he should "remember the poor," which, he adds, he was "eager to do" (Gal. 2:10).³

After this meeting in Jerusalem, Paul spent a lot of energy fulfilling his end of the bargain by collecting money to aid the Jerusalem Christians: basically, the rest of his career, though in the midst of money-raising he had to reestablish his authority in Corinth—the subject of 2 Corinthians 10–13 and 1–7.

In pursuit of the fulfillment of his obligation to Jerusalem, he sought to raise money in Galatia and Corinth, as 1 Cor. 16:1–4 (written in Ephesus) indicates. This was written before he knew how bad things were in Corinth.

Now concerning the collection for the saints: you should follow the directions I gave to the churches of Galatia. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put aside and save whatever extra you earn, so that collections need not be taken when I come. And when I arrive [in Corinth] I will send any whom you approve with letters to take your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me.

In the next verse (1 Cor. 16:5), Paul indicates that he will first travel to Macedonia and then to Corinth. This is the trip that he did not make, deciding to visit Corinth first. That trip was followed by the sequence of letters and visits that we outlined above (pp. 228–31).

Romans gives us the result of the reconciliation and of Paul's

3. I assume that by this time there was actual poverty in the small Christian community in Jerusalem. Acts 4:32–37 indicates that the early church held everything in common, and thus had enough money, but it may have run out. In Hebrew "the poor" has a range of meanings. See J. David Pleins, "The Poor, Poverty," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:402–14.

money-raising efforts. In Rom. 15:6, he requests that the Romans pray for him, asking God to see to it that he “may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea, and that [his] ministry to Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints,” which would allow him to keep to his plan to go to Rome and then farther west (Rom. 15:31–32). This passage implies that his “ministry to the saints in Judea” has been financially successful.

In his view, the right response to his efforts in Jerusalem would hold together the two ministries (his to the gentiles and Peter’s to the Jews), and each would validate the other. A rejection of his offering would throw his own success into doubt. He clearly feared that it might be rejected.

Paul’s hopes did not work out, though for a reason that he could not have foreseen. The trip to Jerusalem, we recall, ended in his arrest and eventually his going to Rome as a prisoner. It is probable that he died there. Thus the collection and its delivery were his last acts as a free itinerant apostle.

In the chapters on Galatians and Romans, we shall see the vast importance that Paul attached to a successful mission to Jerusalem, but I shall say a few words here. Recently Jewish teachers in Galatia had been trying to make Paul’s gentile converts there become fully Jewish by accepting circumcision. If this view were accepted by the “pillar” apostles in Jerusalem, it would mean the failure of Paul’s mission, which was to convert gentiles who would remain gentiles, even though they worshipped the God of Israel. If it took a little money to help smooth over the problem, he would try to raise it. If the Jerusalem apostles accepted the generosity of the gentile Christians, Paul’s efforts to convert gentiles would be validated, even though some Christians believed that they were not valid, since the gentiles were not circumcised. Thus the money, as it often is, was of political importance. Additionally, charity toward the poor was good

in and of itself, as was taught by the Hebrew Bible, Jesus, and pagan ethicists.

The collection was also important to Paul because he viewed it as the fulfillment of prophecy. This will be one of the topics when we discuss Galatians. Here I shall merely note that in biblical passages (such as Isa. 2 and Micah 4) and other Jewish literature (such as Tobit), the “nations of the world,” that is, the gentiles, are depicted as turning to the God of Israel in the last days, and as coming to Mount Zion (in Jerusalem) bearing gifts—“the wealth of the Gentiles” (Isa. 18:7; 60:5–6, 9, 11).⁴ The gentile money that Paul was taking to Jerusalem in his mind probably symbolized the fulfillment of these prophecies.

The money, Paul wrote to Rome, has been provided by “Macedonia and Achaia,” who have “been pleased to share their resources with the poor among the saints at Jerusalem” (Rom. 15:25–26). “Macedonia” includes the congregations in Thessalonica and Philippi, while “Achaia” is principally or possibly exclusively Corinth. (We do not have certain knowledge of other churches in the Province of Achaia.⁵)

4. On the “pilgrimage of gentiles to Mount Zion in the last days, bearing gifts,” see further below, pp. 468–69. A much fuller account is in Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief* (London: SCM, 1992), 289–98.

5. In Greece, Paul shows no sign of knowing the old regional names (such as Boetia and Attica), but rather follows the terminology of the Roman provinces, according to which the country was divided into two parts, “Macedonia” and “Achaia.” A curiosity of the Roman system was that some Greek cities, including Athens, were free cities, standing outside the provincial structure. If one spoke *geographically*, one would put Athens in Achaia, but for the purposes of politics and taxation it was not in Achaia. Paul was probably following the political definition when he wrote that “the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia” (1 Cor. 16:15). Surely he had earlier converted someone in Athens (see 1 Thess. 3:1), but Athens was not in Achaia as defined by Rome. Thus it is quite possible that when in 1 and 2 Corinthians he writes about “Achaia” and “Achaians” he is not including Athens. We do not know of any other congregations that he founded in Greece in addition to the two in Macedonia (Philippi and Thessalonica), Athens, and Corinth.

He does, to be sure, address 2 Corinthians 1–9 to “the congregation of God which is in Corinth, along with all the saints in the whole of Achaia,” which implies that there were some converts in Achaia besides the Corinthians. Nevertheless, we do not know who they were or

It is perhaps noteworthy that in Rom. 15:25–26 Paul does not mention contributions from Galatia, which may show that he lost his argument with the Galatian churches. On the other hand, he also does not mention “Asia,” home of Ephesus, where he labored for years. It is hard to think that he raised no money there, and so perhaps he restricts himself to Macedonia and Achaia only because in 2 Corinthians 8 he tried to set up a competition between the Macedonians and the Achaians.

We now turn to these two closely related letters. It is easily possible to write a great deal about these chapters, but I shall try to reduce my comments to a few essentials.

2 Corinthians 8

There are three principal aspects of this chapter: Paul’s appeals to the Corinthians to contribute to the collection, his recommendation of those who will serve as stewards of the money, and his defense of his own motives and conduct.

Appeals to the Corinthians

In 2 Cor. 8:1–15, Paul appeals to the Corinthians to make a generous donation to aid the saints in Jerusalem. As usual, he has more than one way to phrase a persuasive argument. He begins by praising the Macedonians for their generosity despite their “extreme poverty,” which has overflowed in a “wealth of generosity” (8:1–5). The point is clearly intended to inspire the Corinthians to do the same. Paul offers a kind of challenge to the Corinthians, sweetening it by beginning with praise: “Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge . . . we want you to excel also in this

where they were. It is possible that when he traveled from Athens to Corinth he converted a few households that were not large enough to be called “congregations,” but were only scattered “saints.”

generous undertaking” (8:7). This is a pointed admonition to outdo the Macedonians. He wishes to “prove by testing” (*dokimazōn*) the genuineness of their love by comparing it to the earnestness or zeal of the Macedonians (8:8).

The second effort to persuade the Corinthians appeals to the example of “our Lord Jesus Christ,” who was “rich,” yet who became “poor” in order that through his “poverty” the Corinthians might become “rich” (8:9). I put “rich,” “poor,” “poverty,” and “rich” in quotation marks in order to emphasize that this example, based on Jesus’ gracious gift, is metaphorical; Paul applies the example of Christ to the question of money. The infant Jesus was not financially rich. The theology of this reversal from Jesus’ “riches” to his “poverty” is similar to that of Phil. 2:6-11: Jesus “emptied himself” and even suffered death, after which God highly exalted him. In 2 Corinthians, however, this theology is a figure of speech to encourage the Corinthians to give generously.

Next Paul urges that it is appropriate for the Corinthians to complete a task that they began a year ago, completing it to the best of their ability (“according to your means”: 8:10-12). This probably means that they began regular donations when Paul asked them to do so at the end of 1 Corinthians (1 Cor. 16:1-4).

Finally, Paul emphasizes that the Corinthians at present have an abundance, while the poor in Jerusalem are in need. He wants them to balance things out as best they can, so that all have enough, quoting Exod. 16:18 to prove that no one should have too much or too little (8:13-15).

Recommendation of Titus and Other Stewards

Paul’s second main purpose in this brief letter is to recommend Titus and two unnamed “brothers” who apparently will serve as stewards of the money. Titus had already done some work with regard to

the collection, probably encouraging the Corinthians to follow Paul's written instructions in 2 Corinthians 8:6. We do not know who the two brothers are. Because of the role of Apollos in 1 Corinthians, where Paul clearly shows that he is suspicious of him (1 Cor. 3:5-15), and where he later says that he has encouraged Apollos to return to Corinth (1 Cor. 16:12), it is tempting to guess that one of the brothers—perhaps the one “who is famous among all the churches for his proclaiming the good news” (8:18)—was Apollos. But there really is no point in guessing, since we shall never have direct evidence. These three men have “been appointed by the churches to travel with us while we are administering this generous undertaking” (8:19).

Paul's Self-Defense

The appointment of stewards to oversee the transmission of the collection to Jerusalem leads directly to the third main point, which Paul bluntly states: “We intend that no one should blame us about this generous gift that we are administering” (8:20). Paul wished not only to handle the money correctly but to be seen to handle it correctly, as he explains in 8:21. We recall that in 1 Thess. 2:3-12 (p. 183-84 above) there is a long self-defense, in which Paul, among other things, states that “we never came with words of flattery or with a pretext for greed” (2:5). This goes on so long and is so vigorous that one wonders if someone accused Paul of using his position to improve his own finances. If this was suspected in Thessalonica, Paul had overcome such suspicions, since the Macedonians were leading contributors to the collection for Jerusalem.

In the discussion of 1 Thessalonians, I preferred the view that “he was very sensitive on issues of money, praise, and motives and reacted defensively to the least little thing,” rather than the possibility that there had been an accusation of financial chicanery. I am even more strongly inclined to that view in the present case. Paul wanted to

head off any and all possible accusations and took steps at an early date to have others actually handle the money and accompany him and it all the way to Jerusalem. He was indeed very prickly about his reputation for honesty, but 2 Cor. 8:20–21 is not nearly so defensive in tone as is 1 Thess. 2:3–12.⁶

2 Corinthians 9

This chapter is a separate letter or a part of a longer letter. It begins, “It is not necessary for me to write you about the ministry to the saints,” which shows that it did not originally follow 2 Corinthians 8.

Paul again sets up a competition between the Corinthians and the Macedonians: he had boasted to the Macedonians about how eager the Corinthians were to send support to Jerusalem (9:2). Then he warns them of how things will look if some Macedonians accompany him to Corinth and discover that the Corinthians have not done enough. “We would be humiliated—to say nothing of you” (9:4). Therefore he is sending “some brothers” to precede him to Corinth, so that they can be sure the money is in hand (9:5).

Despite this rather coercive argument, he insists that “each of you must give as you make up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (9:7).

Besides all that, they should recognize that God has provided them with material benefits in order that they may share them. God will also bestow spiritual gifts on them (9:10–11), and their contribution to the saints will constitute thanksgiving to God and glorification of him (vv. 12–13).

One or more of his persuasive techniques worked well enough for

6. It is worth recalling that Paul’s opponents in Corinth, rather than accusing Paul of fleecing the Corinthians, had proposed that he was not a real apostle, since he refused payment. Paul replied, “Did I commit a sin by humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I proclaimed God’s good news to you free of charge?” (2 Cor. 11:7).

him to end his efforts in Europe and Asia Minor and to take the money and representative gentiles to Jerusalem, planning thereafter to go to Rome and then head farther west.

Galatians, Part 1: Introduction

Where Was Galatia?

Galatians poses two unusually interesting introductory questions: who were the addressees and where did they live? This is sufficiently intriguing that I have written a substantial number of pages about it. But, since the contents of the letter can be understood without identifying precisely the churches to which Paul wrote, I decided to put the long discussion in appendix II. As an enticement, I should add that the appendix provides interesting information about how Celts (see immediately below) came to settle in Asia Minor, the organization of areas within the Roman Empire, and the characteristics of Acts.

I shall very briefly summarize the issue of where Galatia was.

1. The word *Galatia* refers to land settled by Celts, sometimes called “Gauls.” At one time Celts controlled substantial portions of Europe, and they had many military successes, but they lost

important battles to Rome, and Germanic tribes pushed them from some of their territories. There are still Celtic areas in Great Britain (“the Celtic fringe”), France, Spain, and Portugal.

Groups of Celts entered Asia Minor in the third century BCE, settling and ruling over an area in the northwestern quarter of the central plateau of Asia Minor, in the general region of Ancyra, now called Ankara (the capital of Turkey).¹

This gives us one of the possible meanings of the Galatia to which Paul wrote: the area around present-day Ankara that was ruled by Celts. We shall call this area “regional Galatia.”

2. The second possible meaning of Galatia arises from the fact that more than two hundred years later, in 25 BCE, the emperor Augustus created a huge province in the center of Asia Minor, extending from near the Black Sea in the north almost to the Mediterranean Sea in the south, which he named “Galatia.”² The province included the area settled by Celts but extended much further, especially to the south and north (see the map, p. 748). We shall call this area “provincial Galatia.”

Thus when Paul wrote to “the churches of Galatia,” he may have addressed congregations in the smaller regional area or elsewhere in the larger province.

J. B. Lightfoot pointed out many years ago that people who know a geographical area well do not call it by the names assigned by a conquering empire (appendix II, p. 756–57). The Hapsburg Empire (also called the Austro-Hungarian Empire) included Hungary and parts of Italy. Yet no ordinary person would say that Budapest or Venice were in Austria. Thus to Lightfoot’s mind, “Galatia” in Paul’s

1. The name has sometimes been transliterated as “Angora.”

2. On the history of the province of Galatia, see A. H. M. Jones, *Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 132–35.

letter meant the smaller ethnic region (“regional Galatia”). This has often been called the **North Galatia hypothesis**.

I believe that this argument is correct and should carry the day. In the appendix one can see that both Paul and the author of Acts tended to use the regional names of Asia Minor, which they knew quite well, though not of Greece, which was less familiar to them.

For many scholars, however, this perfectly reasonable view has a fatal flaw: Acts never explicitly states that Paul founded churches in regional Galatia. He passes by it or through the edge of it, but never (in Acts) settles in and wins enough converts to make up a congregation. On the other hand, Acts does include a missionary visit to churches in cities located in a part of provincial Galatia that was well south of regional Galatia. Acts refers to preaching missions by Paul and Barnabas in the following regions: *Pisidia* (Antioch in Pisidia, Acts 13:14); *Lyconia* (Acts 14:6, Lystra and Derbe in Lycaonia); and *Pamphylia* (Acts 14:24, the city Perga or Perge). Acts does not assign a fourth city, Iconium, to a region (Acts 14:21); historically it had been related to both Phrygia and Lycaonia and in Paul’s day was in Lycaonia.

All of these regions in the southern part of Asia Minor were in the Roman province “Galatia.” Thus, the argument runs, we know that Paul founded churches in the southern part of provincial Galatia, but we do not know that he founded churches in regional Galatia. Therefore, when writing to the “Galatians” Paul must have written to some combination of Pisidian Antioch, Lystra, Derbe, and Iconium. This is called the **South Galatia hypothesis**.

It is noteworthy that the author of Acts, who knew the area, calls these regions by their old names and does not refer to them as “Galatia.”

As appendix II will make clear, I strongly favor the North Galatia hypothesis: Paul’s letter was sent to churches in the region of Galatia,

not to those in Iconium, Pisidia, and Lycaonia. I note that two of the more recent major commentaries on Galatians in English accept the North Galatia hypothesis virtually without discussion.³

Chronological Sequence

I shall briefly note that Paul may have founded the Galatian churches before he first entered Europe by way of Macedonia.⁴ The foundation date is an interesting question, but since I am not dealing with the chronology of Paul's life, but rather the chronology of his letters, I shall leave it aside.

We turn then to the question of where the letter to the Galatians falls relative to the other Pauline letters, which is an interesting and important one. One of the perennial topics of Pauline studies, and a substantial point in the present book, is how Paul's thought changed over time and how circumstances brought out different opinions and formulations. Therefore we need to be able to situate of Galatians in the chronology of the Pauline corpus.

At the time of Lightfoot's commentary (1865, tenth ed., 1890), the general view was that Galatians was written fairly early, from Ephesus, prior to the eruption of difficulties in Corinth. This made the sequence of the four major letters Galatians, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, and Romans.⁵

Lightfoot himself, however, put Galatians later. He noted that Galatians is closest to the Corinthian correspondence and Romans in "style, matter . . . general tone and treatment." With regard to style

3. H. D. Betz, *Galatians*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 1–5; J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 15–17.

4. Gerd Lüdemann notes that the churches in Galatia could have been founded either before or after Paul's first missionary activity in Greece (*Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles: Studies in Chronology* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984], 262).

5. J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (London and Cambridge: MacMillan and Co., 1865, 10th ed., 1890), 40.

and tone, the “third missionary journey,” when Paul had so much trouble with Corinth, “was a season of severe conflict with St Paul, both mental and bodily, and the traces of this conflict are stamped indelibly on the epistles written during this period.” Thus the air of conflict puts Galatians close chronologically to the other three main letters: 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, and Romans.

Lightfoot noted, quite correctly, that in “tone and feeling” Galatians is closest to 2 Corinthians, while from the point of view of content it is closest to Romans.⁶ It seemed to Lightfoot that Galatians occupies “an intermediate position . . . a chronological link” between 2 Corinthians and Romans, and that is where he placed it.⁷

For J. Louis Martyn, the decisive issue was whether or not a letter mentions Paul’s collection for the Christian community in Jerusalem. This meant that 1 Thessalonians, Galatians, and Philippians were all written before Paul conceived the plan to take up a collection. Galatians thus goes before the Corinthian correspondence and Romans. The statement in 1 Cor. 16:1–4, that Paul had instructed the Galatians about the collection, shows that after he conceived the plan he wrote a second, lost letter to Galatia.⁸

The weakness of this position is that one may easily say that the seriousness of the rupture in Galatia made it impracticable for Paul to ask the Galatians for money, just as he did not mention it in the painful letter of 2 Corinthians 10–13. Thus I would not use this point in order to date Galatians, but it does show that there must have been an earlier (or possibly a later) letter to Galatia about the collection.

Hans Dieter Betz noted that there is development of Paul’s thought between Galatians and Romans, which points to the conclusion that Galatians proceeds Romans. Though there are some similarities

6. Ibid. On pp. 43–48 he gives tables of similarities between Galatians and Romans.

7. Ibid., 49.

8. Martyn, *Galatians*, 19–20.

between Galatians and 2 Corinthians 10–13, “they prove neither any sequential order nor even temporal closeness.”⁹ Betz remained agnostic about the order of the letters.

My own view is in agreement with Lightfoot: Galatians was written after the Corinthian correspondence and before Romans. The key point is that 1 Thessalonians and most of the Corinthian correspondence are innocent of the issues of Galatia; thus it is highly probable that Galatians was written after most of the Corinthian correspondence. I should, however, note that it is probable that the crisis in Galatia overlapped with the crisis in Corinth,¹⁰ and there is some evidence that Paul wrote Galatians before the chronologically last part of 2 Corinthians (chaps. 1–9).¹¹ I shall quickly list some of the main points that indicate that Galatians was written after most of the Corinthian correspondence and then summarize the reasoning that leads to this conclusion.

1. In 1 Cor. 9:19–23, Paul presents himself as apostle to both Jew and gentile, living sometimes as Jew, sometimes as gentile. In Galatians, he is definitely apostle to gentiles, not Jews: Peter is apostle to the circumcised. Paul wants freedom to conduct his apostleship toward gentiles as he sees fit. In Romans 15, he is again solely the apostle to the gentiles, whose mission will affect Jewish conversions only indirectly, through jealousy.
2. Circumcision is treated as “indifferent” in 1 Cor. 7:18–20.

9. Betz, *Galatians*, 11.

10. See p. 417 n. 6.

11. Gregory Tatum has persuasively argued that much of the *language* and some of the motifs of the Galatian debate is reworked and used in 2 Corinthians 1–9. For example, the discussion of the “ministry of death” written on “tablets of stone” (2 Cor. 3:7) might spring from the Galatian controversy (*New Chapters in the Life of Paul: The Relative Chronology of His Career*, Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series 41 [Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2006], 59–72). Since there is no “Galatian” language in 2 Corinthians 10–13, he places Galatians chronologically after 2 Corinthians 10–13 and before 2 Corinthians 1–9. As I explained above, I believe this to be correct, but for the purposes of this book it seemed impractical to discuss Galatians between two parts of the Corinthian correspondence.

Everyone should stay in the same state, no one should change; but the argument against changing (especially changing from uncircumcised to circumcised) is only that: better not to change. In Galatians, we learn that someone wants to force his gentile converts to be circumcised, and that drives Paul to the fiercest verbal attacks in his letters. In Galatians, he strongly opposes the circumcision of his gentile converts. He thinks that the uncircumcised converts *must not* be circumcised.

3. “Faith” and “righteousness” (or “justification”) have their standard Greek meanings in 1 and 2 Corinthians: faith is steadfastness and the like, while the language of righteousness means moral uprightness; the passive verb “to be justified” means “be cleansed or forgiven” in 1 Cor. 6:11. In Galatians, “being justified by faith, not by law” is a strongly polemical phrase, directed against specific opponents who are out to destroy Paul’s work. In Galatians, Philippians, and Romans, it comes to mean the same as “becoming one person in Christ” and excludes the adoption of the Jewish law by Paul’s converts. (Below, we shall see that it is better to use the neologism “to be righteoused” than the usual “to be justified.”)

It is highly dubious that after Galatians Paul could have referred to his own apostleship to both Jew and Greek so casually (no. 1 above), without limiting himself in any way to gentiles or acknowledging the fact that Peter had primacy in preaching to the Jews. Similarly, circumcision (no. 2 above), which continues to draw invective in Philippians and strong argumentation in Romans, could hardly be treated as it is in 1 Corinthians 7 if Galatians had already been written. And I do not doubt that after Galatians, Paul’s language of righteousness and faith (no. 3 above) changed permanently: the change is evident in Philippians and Romans, but is absent from

the Corinthian correspondence. Thus I place Galatians after the Corinthian letters (with the possible exception of 2 Cor. 1–9).

The language of righteousness, faith, and circumcision in Philippians and Romans seems to be derivative from Galatians. Despite the nasty remark about circumcision in Phil. 3:2 (circumcisers are dogs), there is no sign that the Philippians were being plagued by “false brothers” who were trying to convert them to the Jewish law. The reference to the circumcision party is at home in Galatians but has no setting in Philippians, except as a general warning. In Romans, Paul revises some of his argument in Galatians about righteousness, faith, and circumcision. Consequently, Philippians and Romans go after Galatians.

Paul and Galatia: Uncertainties

Galatians in some ways is Paul’s most important letter, and it is one of the more important documents in human history, as we shall eventually see. First, however, following the format of earlier chapters, we shall consider Paul’s relations with the Galatians. We know very little, and so this discussion will be mostly a list of things that we cannot know.

In the cases of 1 Thessalonians and 1 and 2 Corinthians, we know what sort of cities they were and some of the characteristics and problems of his converts. We do not have corresponding information with regard to the Galatians. We know nothing about the social and economic status of Paul’s converts, their precise religious background, their habits and preferences, or their argumentative abilities. Lightfoot was wrong to think that assigning the letter to regional Galatia means that we can describe the personality and character of Paul’s converts, on the ground that all Celts were like stereotypical Irish.¹²

The letter to the Galatians, which is focused on one major

problem, does not reveal the range of information about the recipients that we receive from 1 Thessalonians and the Corinthian correspondence. From the point of view of our inferred information about Paul's converts, 1 Corinthians and Galatians stand at opposite extremes. We know a lot about the Corinthians but virtually nothing about the Galatians.

We also do not know nearly as much about the crisis in Galatia as we do about the problems in Corinth. In the Corinthian correspondence we have names (Apollos), parties (the Peter party), and issues: super-apostles wielding high-handed authority (slapping a convert), accepting money, possessing worldly wisdom and sophisticated speech, and so on. We do not understand these points with precision, but at least we see some back-and-forth relationships among the super-apostles, the Corinthians, and Paul. In Galatia, we know only one controversy: whether or not gentiles should be circumcised. We have allusions to opponents (Gal. 3:1; 5:7) but no indication of the basis of their authority. Did they act in the name of one of the other apostles? Did they themselves claim to be apostles?

Finally, we do not know how Paul found out that the Galatians were being circumcised or were considering circumcision. There is no parallel to 1 Corinthians, in which he refers to a letter and visitors from the church in Corinth.

We do learn that when the Galatians accepted Paul's message, they received the Spirit and that God worked miracles among them (Gal. 3:2-5). This was Paul's standard expectation, and it does not allow us to characterize the converts. The only other information about Paul's relationship to his churches in Galatia, prior to the crisis that resulted in the present letter, is this section of Galatians 4, part of which we have already noted:

12. Above, n. 6.

Friends, I beg you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You have done me no wrong. You know that it was because of a physical infirmity that I first announced the gospel to you; though my condition put you to the test, you did not scorn or despise me, but welcomed me as a messenger¹³ of God, as Christ Jesus. What has become of the good will you felt? For I testify that, had it been possible, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. (4:12-15)

This passage has led to almost as much spilled ink as the problem of what Paul meant by “Galatia.” What was Paul’s physical infirmity (4:13)? Was it eye trouble (“you would have torn out your eyes,” 4:15)? Was it physically disgusting (“put you to the test,” 4:14)? Was it the same as the “thorn in the flesh” mentioned in 2 Cor. 12:7? We do not know. These verses constitute a welcome, soft moment in Paul’s letter, which is mostly marked by anger and defensiveness, but unfortunately they do not yield much information. The Galatian churches were someplace in which Paul did not plan to preach (which may suggest that they were in the hinterland), but we cannot say much more.

All we actually know about the congregations is that Paul’s opponents (presumably other Jewish Christians) were forcing or trying to force the Galatian converts to accept circumcision. Paul vehemently opposed requiring circumcision as an entry rite to the people of God, called in this letter “descendants of Abraham.” He thought that faith in Christ alone gave gentiles entry to the people who would be saved at the judgment.¹⁴

13. The Greek word *angelos* means “messenger.” Most translations have rendered *angelos* here as “angel,” which implies a heavenly being. This may be correct, especially in view of the next phrase, “as Christ Jesus.” On the other hand, “*angelos* of God” (a human messenger) is not quite the same as “*angelos* from heaven” (a heavenly being) in 1:8. In Greek, of course, Paul did not have to distinguish between “angel” and “messenger.”

14. On circumcision as an entry rite to the people of God, or a membership requirement for being in the people of God, see Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 18–20; see also below, pp. 460–61.

The Significance of the Letter

Above, I wrote that Galatians is from some points of view Paul's most important letter and one of the more important documents of human history. Its significance is that in it, for the first time, Paul formulates positions that, when carried through, will support the separation of the Christian movement from its parent, Judaism. This is not to say that this letter *caused* the rupture, or that Paul wanted it to happen. What actually broke Christianity away from Judaism took place "on the ground," in the gentile churches founded by Paul and others, which were not synagogues. Paul's churches were socially distinct from Judaism, and this was probably also true of other churches in the gentile world, such as the church at Rome. But when, in the second and third centuries, Christian theologians had to think through the question of their own identity and began the quest for "normative self-definition," one of the main issues was their relationship to the Israelites, the elect of the God whom they worshipped. Were Christians the "true Israel" in contrast to the Jews, who were the "false Israel"? Were they rather a third and new race, neither Jew nor gentile? And what about the Jewish law? Was it only for Jews, or did it apply to all of God's people?¹⁵ Among the things they had to consider was Paul's attack on the Jewish law (as Galatians appears to be), and it helped them think that there had been a definite breach between Jews and those in Christ.

In the view of some Christians in the second century, it was more than all right not to be very Jewish. One of the leading figures of the age was Marcion, who was from Sinope, on the northern coast of

15. It is possible to find in Paul's letters some support for both the conception of Christians as "the new Israel" and as "a third race," but Paul does not develop these hints to the point that we could call either "his view." See Sanders, "Paul's Jewishness," in *Paul's Jewish Matrix*, ed. Thomas G. Casey and Justin Taylor (Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2011), 64 and esp. n. 21, pp. 64–65. On the efforts of Christianity to achieve "normative self-definition," see E. P. Sanders et al., ed., *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980–82).

Asia Minor.¹⁶ He moved to Rome, however, where he flourished (c. 135–160 CE). Marcion thought that there were two gods, the evil god of the Hebrew Scripture and the good god of Christianity. It is quite easy to find passages in the Hebrew Bible in which God orders his people to do dreadful things, or in which God's servants do dreadful things. For example, according to 2 Kgs. 2:23–24, the prophet Elisha cursed some children who teased him for being bald, and two bears came out of the woods and ate the children. We now ignore such passages or explain them as belonging to an unenlightened age. To Marcion, they proved that the God of the Hebrew Bible was evil.

There was at the time no New Testament. The Gospels and Paul's letters had been written and were in circulation among Christians, but Christianity still accepted the Hebrew Bible (as translated into Greek) as the only Scripture, though they read Paul and the Gospels for edification. Marcion seized upon the letters of Paul, especially Galatians and Romans, as revealing another god, a good god who sent Jesus and who worked through Paul.

Marcion in effect proposed that there should be a Christian Bible. His new Bible consisted of parts of the Gospel of Luke and ten Pauline letters.¹⁷ According to Tertullian, Marcion put Galatians at the head of the Pauline corpus.¹⁸ It represented Paul's decisive rejection of circumcision and the Jewish law. Tertullian wrote that

16. For a good brief account of Marcion's career and thought, see W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 212–18.

17. The ten letters were Galatians, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Romans, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, Ephesians (which Marcion called Laodiceans), Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon. On Marcion and the New Testament canon, see John Knox, *Philemon among the Letters of Paul* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935), 76–90; Knox, *Marcion and the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942); E. C. Blackman, *Marcion and his Influence* (London: SPCK, 1948), chap. 2. Blackman gives Marcion less credit for “inventing” the New Testament canon than does Knox (who was developing the views of Adolph von Harnack). He grants, however, that “Marcion introduced the first fixed canon of Christian Scriptures” (p. 32).

18. Knox, *Philemon*, 77.

Marcion's "special and chief work was the separation of the law from the Gospel."¹⁹

Marcion was eventually declared a heretic, and what became orthodox Christianity denied his separation of the God of Israel from the God of Jesus Christ. Christian orthodoxy affirmed that there is only one God, who created the world, which he declared good; called Israel; gave the law through Moses; and sent Jesus to save sinful humans. There was one God and one Bible, which the victorious orthodox party divided into two testaments, old and new. Paul's letters, which helped lead Marcion to reject the Hebrew Scripture, showed other Christians how to give it an exclusively Christian meaning.²⁰

The orthodox Christians retained Galatians, though they moved it to a less prominent place, and to Marcion's list of books they added (among other works) Acts and the Pastoral Epistles (1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus), which helped to tie Christianity to the history of Israel and to the God of the Hebrew Bible. These books eliminate or mute Paul's resounding attack on circumcision and the law, thus making it easier to hold "Paul" and the "Old Testament" together. Thus the New Testament of what became Christian orthodoxy was less hostile to the Jewish law than was Marcion's canon. In weakening Marcion's radicalness, the victorious Christian party also made Paul less radical than he was when he wrote Galatians. This led one prominent historian to remark that "Paul had only one student who understood him [Marcion], and he misunderstood him."²¹

Martin Luther's understanding of Galatians was better than that of Marcion. He found in it (as also in Romans and Ephesians, especially

19. Frend, *Christianity*, 214.

20. Henry Chadwick, *The Church in Ancient Society: From Galilee to Gregory the Great* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 41.

21. Franz Overbeck, *Christentum und Kultur* (Basel: Benno Schwabe, 1919), 218–19. The remark has been quoted by numerous scholars.

Eph. 2:8–9) the “doctrine” of justification by faith, without works of law, and other views that, in his mind, accompanied this doctrine. According to Luther’s preface to his commentary on Galatians, prior to Paul almost everyone “went his own way, hoping to placate a god or goddess . . . by his own works; that is, hoping without the aid of Christ and by his own works to redeem himself from evils and sins.”²²

There are, according to Luther, various kinds of righteousness: political or civil, ceremonial, legal (following the Ten Commandments), and the righteousness of faith. This last is “mere passive righteousness,” bestowed by God “by mere imputation.”²³ Humans are unable to attain legal righteousness. This is why the righteousness of faith must be “imputed”—that is, attributed to us by God, though legally we are unrighteous.

Although I am a sinner by the law, as touching the righteousness of the law, yet I despair not, yet I die not, because Christ liveth, who is both my righteousness and my everlasting and heavenly life. In that righteousness and life I have no sin. . . . I am indeed a sinner as touching this present life and the righteousness thereof.²⁴

The enemies of Paul, Luther proposed, “mingled the law with the Gospel,” and so of necessity perverted the Gospel. “For either Christ must remain, and the law perish, or the law must remain, and Christ perish; for Christ and the law can by no means agree and reign together in the conscience.”²⁵ This sentence, however, gives too negative an impression of Luther’s view of works of the law.

We grant that we must teach also *good works and charity*, but it must be done in time and place, that is to say, when the question is concerning

22. Martin Luther, *A Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians*, rev. ed., ed. Philip S. Watson (London: James Clarke, 1953), 16. The original text was published in 1535; the translation basically is from 1575, which explains the archaic English.

23. *Ibid.*, 21–23.

24. *Ibid.*, 26.

25. *Ibid.*, 67.

works, and toucheth not this article of justification. But here the question is, by what means we are justified and attain eternal life. To this we answer with Paul, that by faith only in Christ we are *pronounced* righteous, and not by the works of the law or charity: not because we reject good works, as our adversaries accuse us. . . . Wherefore since we are now in the matter of justification, we reject and condemn all good works: for this place will admit no disputation of good works. In this matter therefore we do generally cut off all laws and all the works of the law.²⁶

Some of this, as we shall see in what follows, agrees with Paul's views and the present book, especially the point that in discussing justification (or righteousness) and the law in Paul, we must *distinguish between one subject and another*. Paul wrote different things about the law and works, depending on what the question was. On the need to distinguish topics in order to understand Paul on righteousness and works, then, I fully agree with Luther.

On the other hand, we shall see that "mere imputation" is not Paul's view of Christian righteousness. He believed that those who died with Christ were really changed and no longer lived in sin. One of Luther's slogans was *simul justus et peccator*, "at the same time justified and a sinner." That was not Paul's view: he believed in transformation.²⁷

Above I pointed out the most seriously defective aspect of Luther's view of Paul (pp. 42-44), but it is so important to understanding Galatians that I wish to repeat it here. The error was the opinion that prior to Paul all individuals were engaged in the effort to save themselves by good works (see "by his own works," above at n. 17). People in the ancient world did not believe that all individuals faced God alone and had to think up ways to save themselves. Ancient

26. *Ibid.*, 141-42. Emphasis added.

27. Stephen Turnbull explained to me that Luther had more sympathy for "real transformation" (as distinct from "revised self-understanding") than many modern Lutheran scholars, though in Luther transformation is connected to exegesis of John rather than of Paul.

religion was highly collective; individuals did not, one by one, have to figure out how to do enough good works to save themselves. They were “okay” if they fulfilled the principal obligations of their religion. Thus they did not have the problem that Luther attributed to them.

Christianity became obsessed with individual salvation and its exclusivity: individuals had to do something special to escape an afterlife of unimaginably horrific punishment, and many Christians have retrojected this view into the ancient Jewish and Greek religions. Although religions of special salvation were penetrating the Greco-Roman world, in general the Jews and Greeks of Paul’s day did not feel that unless there was some super-special intervention by a higher power they were doomed to eternal torment. It took a while, in fact, for the idea of hell to develop.

Luther’s second most important erroneous view was that “works of law” in Paul meant “good deeds” (note “*good works and charity*” above), especially good deeds that, when enumerated, are sufficient to earn salvation. There is no such concept in Paul’s letters, nor does the phrase “works of law” in his letters refer to good and charitable deeds.

But I am getting ahead of the study of the letter. Despite these remarks, I do not perceive myself to be a critic of Luther’s own theology. He was a towering figure in the history of Christianity, with his own distinctive and perceptive theological views. I have given the previous summary because Luther has strongly influenced modern New Testament scholarship, much of which finds in Paul precisely what Luther did, though many of his followers find even less use for the Jewish law than did Luther.

Galatians is probably the most misunderstood of Paul’s letters. Many Protestant scholars have read it as containing an attack on *good works* as essential to salvation, and they have understood it to be a broadside against Judaism’s supposed doctrine of saving themselves

by works, to which Paul opposes his doctrine of justification by faith alone, without works of law. This “proves,” to many readers, that Judaism was a religion of *individual* self-salvation by meritorious *works*, while Christianity was based on acceptance of God’s grace, demonstrated by faith in Christ. In fact, this is not the subject of the letter, as we shall see. Paul does find Judaism wanting, but not on these grounds.

In this letter, as in all his other letters, Paul was unhesitatingly in favor of good works and saw no contrast between “good works” and “justification by faith.” When he discussed “works of the law” in Galatians, he had in mind *specific features of the Jewish law* that some Christians wanted Paul’s converts to accept. The social function of the features that Paul opposed was the separation of Jew from gentile and the requirement that people had to be Jewish in order to be Christian and thus enter the people of God. That is, the aspects of the law that Paul did not want to apply to gentiles had to do with membership in the historical people of God.

This attempt to indicate the importance of Galatians in Christian history, in which I have briefly discussed only Marcion and Luther, though sadly inadequate, is, I hope, sufficient at least to hint at the influence that Galatians has had in Christian history.²⁸ It is Paul’s most vociferous and polemical letter, and it tends strongly toward polarization—readers identify themselves with Paul and see their own enemies as Paul’s and thus as completely wrong, “cut off” from God (cf. Gal. 5:4). In the exegesis of Galatians, I shall present the issues in their original context, which is that of neither Marcion nor Luther, but of Paul’s particular efforts to save gentiles.

28. There is a very brief account of patristic commentaries on Galatians in Lightfoot, *Galatians*, 227–36.

The Issue of Circumcision: Background

As one discovers in Gal. 2:3, the issue that triggers Paul's letter is circumcision—specifically the circumcision of gentiles who want to join the Christian movement. I shall give a very brief introduction to the practice of circumcision and to the issues relevant to Galatians.

Circumcision in Israelite/Jewish History

Circumcision of males is the cutting of the foreskin of the penis in such a way as to expose the glans penis. Two forms of the operation are known from antiquity: the complete removal of the foreskin (practiced by the Hebrews and others) and the liberation of the glans by making one or more vertical incisions through the foreskin (the Egyptian practice). Though one can speak of how Egyptians performed circumcision, it is by no means certain that all Egyptian males were circumcised throughout all of the long periods that make up Egyptian history. The evidence for circumcision is too infrequent to allow hard conclusions. It seems probable, however, that all Egyptian priests were circumcised, and that during some periods many males were circumcised.²⁹

Circumcision originated in the pre-historical period, possibly independently in various places. Consequently, we cannot know when and where the custom arose or what it originally meant, though of course scholars have made some useful suggestions.³⁰ Evidence for circumcision goes back as far as 3100 BCE, though the practice was probably much older. In one Egyptian scene, the knife appears to be made of flint. Two passages in the Hebrew Bible specify

29. Joyce M. Filer, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Donald B. Redford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 2:135.

30. J. M. Sasson, "Circumcision in the Ancient Near East," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 85 (1966): 473–76; Frans Jonckheere, "La circoncision des anciens égyptiens," *Centaurus* 1 (1951): 212–34.

that the knife was flint (Josh. 5:2; Exod. 4:25), and the use of a stone-age tool supports the view that the rite was very ancient.

The bulk of information about male circumcision comes from the Hebrew Bible and postbiblical Jewish literature; there are also discussions of circumcision, or references to it, in early Christian literature and in the works of Greek and Latin authors. From this diverse evidence we learn that the Philistines, the Babylonians, the Greeks, the Romans, and the peoples of Asia Minor did not practice circumcision (except for the Syrians who lived in the valleys of the rivers Parthenios and Thermodon [Herodotus 2.104]). Besides the Egyptians and the Israelites, circumcision was the custom of the Edomites, the Moabites, the Ammonites (all mentioned in Jer. 9:26), the Phoenicians, some Syrians, other West Semitic peoples (including the Arabs), and the Colchians (eastern edge of the Black Sea [Herodotus 2.104]). It is still practiced by Jews, Arabs, and other Muslims as a national or religious custom. (I leave aside the modern use of circumcision for reasons of health and hygiene, which was once common in the United States but is now in decline.)

The classic biblical story of circumcision is Genesis 17, in which God commands Abraham and all his male descendants to be circumcised as a “sign of the covenant” between them (17:10). The passage further stipulates that male children are to be circumcised on the eighth day (see also Gen. 21:4; Lev. 12:3) and that slaves, whether born in an Israelite’s house or subsequently acquired, should also be circumcised (17:12–13; cf. Gen. 21:4; Lev. 12:3). Those not circumcised will be “cut off” from the promises given to Abraham (Gen. 17:14). From Genesis 34 we learn that Israelites required foreign males who wished to marry Israelite women to be circumcised, and from Exod. 12:48 that an alien who wished to celebrate Passover must be circumcised, along with the other males of his household.

Since circumcision, the “sign of the covenant” is required of all male descendants of Abraham, we may call it an *entry rite*. Without it, males are *not in the covenant* and therefore are not recipients of the blessings that accompanied the circumcision of Abraham (Gen. 17:6–8).

Despite the fact that other near eastern people practiced circumcision, Greek and Roman authors especially connected circumcision with the Jews, and it was one of the features of Judaism that provoked ridicule and criticism.³¹ The Greeks and Romans regarded circumcision as a form of mutilation that was more or less on the level of barbaric practices.

Thus there was a very solid and large social wedge between Jews and non-Jews in Paul’s world. The circumcision of males was essential to being Jewish. Paul, however, wanted his converts not to be Jewish, but to remain gentiles.

The Question of Circumcising Gentiles in Earliest Christianity

It is highly probable that Paul’s view that gentiles who wished to join the Christian movement need not become Jewish by accepting circumcision was the majority opinion of the apostles during the earliest days of the movement in Jerusalem. Here we turn to the descriptions of this issue in Acts.

Acts narrates Paul’s conversion in chapter 9. At that point in Acts there had been no mention of circumcising gentile converts. Paul’s own account of his conversion includes the statement that God revealed Christ to him so that he could proclaim him among the gentiles (Gal. 1:16). At this early point, Paul, like Acts, does not

31. Menachem Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, 3 vols. (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1976–84); see the index under “circumcision.” More briefly, Molly Whittaker, *Jews and Christians: Graeco-Roman Views* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 80–85.

mention circumcision, and Paul's behavior during his career indicates that he never entertained the idea that he should have his converts circumcised. His earliest passage that mentions circumcision is 1 Cor. 7:18-19, which we quoted above. Here he calmly states that neither the circumcised nor the uncircumcised should change their status, since both circumcision and non-circumcision do not matter. If circumcision had arisen as a problem prior to the writing of 1 Cor. 7:18-19, he almost certainly would not have dismissed the issue so completely.

There is further evidence in Acts that in the early years of the Christian movement gentile converts were not circumcised. In Acts 10, Peter is the first figure to admit gentiles; he does so in part because of a vision that indicates that he need not require the Jewish food laws (Acts 10:9-16) and in part because of the sincerity of a Roman centurion, Cornelius. In the next chapter, Acts 11, there is a controversy about admitting uncircumcised males to the Christian movement. Peter defends his position, and the story concludes without requiring circumcision.

The controversy arises once more in Acts 15. This dispute led to a conference of the leading Christians. James, basing his conclusion partly on Amos 9:11 and Jer. 12:15, ordains that the only requirements of the Jewish law that gentile converts must accept are abstaining from food offered to idols, consumption of blood and meat from an animal that has been strangled (which leaves the blood in the corpse), and sexual immorality (Acts 15:13-20). This agrees fairly closely with Paul's position in 1 Corinthians 8, 10.

There has been a lot of scholarly debate about the relationship or relationships between the conference of Christians that Paul describes in Galatians 2 and the two discussions described in Acts: Peter's defense of the admission of Cornelius in Acts 11 and the council debate about what to require of gentiles in Acts 15. Paul's account can

hardly be equated with either of the passages in Acts, since in Acts Paul is not present, and there is nothing in Acts about a division of mission fields between Peter and Paul.

I think that we should accept Paul's narrative of his meeting with the Jerusalem pillars. I take the debates described in Acts to be accurate *in general*: the leading apostles in Jerusalem admitted gentile converts to the movement without requiring circumcision, but some Christians in Jerusalem opposed this position and wanted gentile converts to be circumcised. As I noted above, the result of the decision-making in Jerusalem as described by Acts corresponded very closely with Paul's views in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10. I do not have full confidence in the details of these discussions in Acts, but in some way or other decisions were reached. In any case, neither Acts 11 nor 15 can be equated with Galatians 2, but they do agree on the outcome at a general level.

Thus chapters 10–11 and 15 in Acts support the view that in the early church gentiles were admitted *as* gentiles, prior to and independently of Paul's missionary activities.

In the next section of this chapter we shall see that in the Hebrew Bible there are many important passages about gentiles, and such passages may have influenced the circumcisers and the anti-circumcisers in the Christian movement. I do not, however, propose that Paul came to his view (admission of gentiles without full conversion to Judaism) as the result of study of the prophets, or that other Christian leaders arrived at similar conclusions by academic work or by arguing about certain passages, for example, Isa. 56:6–8. It is much more likely that the free admission of gentiles arose because of ad hoc decisions by preachers in the field, who responded to the requests of would-be gentile converts and who perceived that uncircumcised gentiles received the blessings of the Holy Spirit. Only later would the issue be debated at a more theoretical level.

Thus I attach a lot of weight to the story of the conversion of Cornelius in Acts 10. Let us say that the story is not entirely true and that it rests in part on Luke's apologetic interest in producing harmony among the major apostles, especially Peter and Paul. It nevertheless describes a way in which the gentile issue might have arisen: a gentile military officer, Cornelius, sent a message to Peter asking for a meeting. The occasion led to Peter's conversion of several gentiles. "The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles" (Acts 10:45). Peter's statement in Acts 11:17 puts the matter precisely: "If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?" This agrees with Paul's confidence that his gentile converts received the Spirit and that *this* proved that they were not required to be circumcised (Gal. 3:1-5).

Thus I do not propose that Christian leaders (such as Peter, James, John, Paul, and Barnabas) sat around a table, studied scrolls of the Hebrew Bible, and concluded that gentiles should be brought into their movement without requiring conversion. I suppose that, instead, the issue of gentile converts arose in the preaching missions of some of the apostles; that the apostles decided to admit them because of their evident devotion; that they showed the spiritual signs of conversion; and that only later did the Christian leaders have to think through the consequences. When they sat down to think the issue through, they *may have been* guided in part by prophetic passages that look forward to the "last days," when gentiles would worship the God of Israel.

As far as we know, Paul actually cited relevant texts only in his last letter, Romans, where he quotes several passages on the gentiles (Rom. 10; see the discussion below, pp. 677-83). This does not prove that he had them in the forefront of his mind when he began

converting gentiles. On the contrary, these passages might be justifications of his practice after the fact. If questions were raised, the passages were there.

Thus I propose that *evangelistic experience*, not study, led to the admission of gentiles. Whatever the motive, it appears that both in Jerusalem and in Paul's mission field, Christian evangelists converted gentiles to faith in Christ and admitted them to the people of God on the basis of their receiving baptism and the Spirit, without requiring circumcision. Thus the effort to force gentiles to be circumcised, though not a novelty (some had held this position all along), was a change from the original practice of the *leaders*. It seems that the circumcision party was tenacious, since the question kept coming up.

Although I do not think that prophetic statements about gentiles were decisive either in Jerusalem or in Paul's mission field, we should pay some attention to them as part of the large context of early Christianity. The prophets had quite a lot to say about gentiles and the end of days, as we now shall see.³²

Gentiles and Circumcision in the Context of the Biblical "History of Salvation"

It is possible for the reader of the Bible to sketch out a history of events between the fall of Adam and the final judgment. These steps include numerous important milestones, such as the covenant with Abraham, the Exodus from Egypt, the gift of the Mosaic law, the apostasy of Israel by worshipping the golden calf in the desert, God's punishment of Israel by the Babylonian Exile, and so on. Shortly after Paul's own time, Josephus would explain the destruction of the temple by saying that assassins had shed blood in the sanctuary, and God brought the Romans to purge the city and the temple with fire

32. In addition to the passages discussed in the next section, I discuss the prophetic predictions on the collection, and on Paul's role in bringing Jews into the body of Christ, at pp. 685-86.

(*War* 4.323; 6.110; *Antiq.* 20.166; cf. *War* 2.455). Many of the events that make up “salvation history” are sequences of sin, punishment, and redemption.

The point that I wish to emphasize is that according to the Bible, throughout Israelite and Jewish history, relations between God and his people fluctuated from estrangement to punishment to reconciliation. But ultimately God always intended to save the chosen people. The history of Israel leads to salvation.

Paul thought that God had a grand plan for the world and for the humans who populated it—that is, that God directed the history of salvation. Paul may not ever have thought about this plan as a whole, but we certainly see his brain evolving views of the place of Christ and of his own mission in God’s plan for salvation, even though this is only occasionally explicit. He thought that his own work was leading up to the final judgment, the overthrow of evil, and the establishment of the rule of God.

For the study of Galatians, where the status of gentiles is *the* topic, it is very important to note especially several passages in Jewish Scripture that indicate that gentiles will have a place in Jewish salvation history. We noted above that in 1 Cor. 9:19–23, Paul presents himself as apostle to both Jew and gentile, living sometimes as Jew, sometimes as gentile. In Galatians, he is definitely apostle to gentiles, not Jews: Peter is apostle to the circumcised (pp. 86; 448–89 above). In Romans, Paul again presents himself as apostle to the gentiles (11:13) and dwells on God’s promises to the gentiles (Rom. 9:25–26). In Rom. 15:10–12, he quotes a catena of passages from Jewish Scripture that are favorable to gentiles. The concluding quotation is this: “. . . Isaiah says, ‘the root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him the Gentiles shall hope.’” “The root of Jesse” is the Messiah, which in Greek is *Christos*, one of Paul’s most common designations of Jesus. Thus Paul found in his Scripture

the statement that *in the Messianic period gentiles would be ruled by the Messiah and that they could put their hope in him*.

Besides the texts quoted by Paul, there are many other passages that point to the inclusion of gentiles in the people of God in the last days: near the end of ordinary history, gentiles would turn to worship the God of Israel. These passages are poetic and prophetic, and usually they do not give legal requirements. Several prophetic predictions depict gentiles as streaming to Mount Zion to worship the one true God. The most famous passage, and one that occurs at the very beginning of the prophetic corpus, is Isa. 2:2-3 (repeated in Mic. 4:1-4):

In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains . . . all the Gentiles³³ shall stream to it. Many people shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths."

Perhaps most striking is Zech. 8:21-23.

. . . the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, "Come, let us go to entreat the favor of the LORD . . . I myself am going." Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to entreat the favor of the LORD. Thus says the LORD of hosts: In those days ten men from nations of every language shall take hold of a Jew, grasping his garment and saying, "Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you."

Other passages speak of the "wealth of gentiles" that will be brought to Mount Zion in the last days (e.g., Isa. 18:7). As noted above (p. 437), these passages may help explain Paul's readiness to take up a collection to help the poor in Jerusalem.

The first Christians, who were Jews, many of whom knew the

33. English translations of Isaiah usually translate "nations" rather than "gentiles." This is accurate, but "gentiles" is better, since the Hebrew word means "all of the *other* nations besides Israel."

Bible very well, would have noted the opening phrase of Isaiah 2 and Micah 4: “in days to come.” They thought that they lived in those days, and consequently they could easily think it right to welcome or even seek gentiles. Since this passage and several others do not say that the gentiles who come to worship the God of Israel in the last days must accept circumcision, the natural conclusion would be that the gentiles could enter the people of God in the last days *as gentiles*. It goes without saying that, since these gentiles turn to the God of Israel, they stop worshipping idols.³⁴

As far as I have noted, in this very large group of passages only one (Isa. 56:3–8) explicitly states that the gentiles who turn to God in the last days should follow the Jewish law. According to 56:3–5, for example, even eunuchs will be included in the people of God—“all those who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant” (56:3–5); “And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD . . . to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, all who keep the Sabbath and do not profane it, and hold fast my covenant—these will I bring to my holy mountain . . .” (Isa. 56:6–7).³⁵

We saw above that the first reaction of the early Christians to the inclusion of gentiles was that they were welcome without the restrictions of Isa. 56:3–8. Gentiles did not have to enter the covenant with Israel by being circumcised. They could remain gentiles. Now we note a curious fact: in the chapters of the New Testament where this topic arises, no one cites the most obvious biblical passages (such as Isa. 2:2) that seem to be so directly relevant to the question of

34. See the list of passages quoted by Paula Fredriksen, “Judaism, the Circumcision of Gentiles, and the Apocalyptic Hope: Another Look at Galatians 1 and 2,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 42/2 (1991): 544 n. 27. Fredriksen’s list of the evidence has the advantage of including postbiblical literature.

35. Jer. 12:15 goes part of the way: Gentiles in the midst of Israel should swear by the name of the Lord.

admitting gentiles into the Christian movement. They appear neither in Galatians (in which the main issue is circumcision of gentiles) nor in the passages in Acts in which Peter, James, and others thrash out the issue. James's citation of Amos 9:11 (Acts 15:15-17) is not actually on point, since there Israel "possesses" the gentiles rather than admitting them (Amos 9:12). But surely Paul thought of these passages while he was in Arabia! The fact that he does not quote them in Galatians leads me to comment a little further on biblical passages concerning "gentiles in the last days" or "in the messianic era."

A full study of the pronouncements of prophets on this topic would lead to a very diverse and confused description of prophetic attitudes. Besides the passages I have quoted favoring the free admission of gentiles, there are passages that expect the military subjugation of gentiles, their enslavement to Jews, their financial exploitation, and even their destruction.³⁶ As noted above, Isaiah 56 indicates that gentiles who join in the worship of the one true God will keep the Sabbath and hold fast the covenant (Isa. 56:6-8). A first-century exegete could well have concluded from this passage that gentiles entering in the last days should make full conversion. Disinterested study of the Bible, however, would not define one view as *the* biblical view.

I proposed above that the prophetic passages favoring the admission of gentiles were not the original source of the view of the early Christians with regard to admission of gentiles, but some of them could serve as backup support if the practice were questioned.

But it is also true that Jewish Christians who had all along argued in favor of the circumcision of gentiles could appeal to biblical passages, especially Isa. 56:6-8. It will soon be clear that other biblical passages

36. For passages and discussion, see Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortres Press, 1985), 213-15.

could be used to support the requirement of circumcision for admission (e.g., the Abraham story, discussed extensively below).

Paula Fredriksen posed a very important question regarding the opposition to Paul in Galatia. She noted that this represented a change from the majority opinion regarding admission of gentiles. What caused the issue to spring up *then*, twenty years or so after Paul began his missionary endeavors?

*These men, the “false brethren,” were actually proposing a startling novelty, both within Judaism and, a fortiori, within the Christian movement. For until c. 49, evidently—that is to say, for nearly twenty years—the ekklesia had never demanded circumcision as an entry requirement for Gentiles. What had changed between c. 30 and c. 49, and why?*³⁷

Her principal answer is this: “Perhaps, sizing up the movement’s situation mid-century, they adduced a causal connection between the Kingdom’s delay and the worsening unreadiness of Israel. Perhaps, not unreasonably, they saw the increasing prominence of Gentiles in the movement as a factor contributing to Jews’ rejecting the gospel.”³⁸

As noted above, there had probably always been some Christians who favored circumcising gentiles. Acts 15:1 refers to them, and there is no reason to think that they gave up their view, even though it was overruled by the pillars, especially Peter and James the brother of the Lord. They are presented as a rump group in Gal. 2:4.

Lots of issues might have created bad relations between Jewish and gentile Christians, and it is easily understandable if many Jewish Christians felt superior to gentile Christians and resented their admission to the people of God. As Fredriksen proposed, time

37. Fredriksen, “Another Look,” 559; emphasis in original.

38. *Ibid.*, 561.

exacerbated whatever tensions there were between Jewish and gentile Christians.

I also support Fredriksen's view that one of the issues that motivated the "circumcision party" in the early Christian movement was that the gentile mission was more successful than the mission to Jews. Jewish Christians began to be outnumbered, and many of them may have wanted to "take the movement back": it was a *Jewish* movement. Many years ago I wrote this:

the entirety of Romans is based on the assumption that Paul's mission . . . has been a success. . . . He . . . regarded his own work among the uncircumcised as successful—he and the gospel proceed in triumph (2 Cor. 2.14). It is noteworthy that it is in Romans—the very letter in which he reflects on Jewish rejection of the gospel—that he presents his own mission as successful, as being almost complete, and as relating only indirectly³⁹ to the salvation of the Jews.

In contrast, the mission of Peter and others to the circumcised (Gal. 2.9) had largely failed, and Paul's reflection on and anguish over that failure is expressed precisely when he is about to travel to Jerusalem (Rom. 9–11), which he considers to be the home of "unbelievers," apparently with relatively few "saints" (Rom. 15.31).⁴⁰

We cannot know why one or more Jewish Christian evangelists decided to go to Galatia in order to undermine Paul's work. The Jewish Christian evangelists who went to Corinth certainly opposed *Paul*, but nothing is said about circumcision as a membership requirement. Phil. 3:2 ("beware of those who mutilate the flesh") shows that he feared that the message of the false brothers would spread, but we hear nothing more about it. His numerous references to circumcision in Romans (2:25–3; 4:9–12; 15:8) do not indicate that

39. Paul's mission only indirectly affected the salvation of Israel. See the discussion of Rom. 11:13–14 below, p. 618.

40. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, 184–85.

after the Galatian crisis he had continued to be plagued by people wanting to circumcise his converts.

The precise reason for the attack on Paul in Galatia—at that time and in that place—remains a mystery. But there are some clues that explain why, late in Paul’s career, some Jewish Christians opposed admitting *so many* gentiles into a Jewish movement without requiring obedience to the Jewish law.

Final Introductory Admonition

In Galatians, as elsewhere, we need to distinguish four topics: what the question was, what Paul’s conclusion was, how he argued for his conclusion, and why he had come to it. The distinction between the last two—his arguments on behalf of a position and his actual reasons for holding it—is one that few students or scholars make. Many people will look at his scriptural proof texts and say, in effect, “That gives Paul’s reason for his view; Gal. 3:10 shows that he rejected righteousness by the law *because* it cannot be adequately fulfilled.” I would propose that we note the argument and the use of the proof text, but that we analyze all his arguments before we decide what his real reasons were. If we consider our own experiences for a minute, we shall know that people often put forward arguments in favor of a position that they reached in a different way. Most of Galatians is one long argument, consisting of many parts. We must be cautious not to pull out one of the parts and say, “*this* explains Paul’s *reason* for holding the view that he held.” We need to study the entire long argument and especially note its conclusion.

Galatians, Part 2: The Crisis in Galatia and the Beginning of Paul's Response

An Angry Letter?

The best way to comprehend Galatians is to read it out loud, shouting in an angry voice at the appropriate points. This reading style cannot be expressed in writing very well, but I shall do what I can. First, however, one caveat. I think that Paul was angry when he wrote the letter, and I picture him as pacing while he dictated, sometimes shouting, occasionally pleading. I also think that anger led him to make a few extreme statements, which, when compared with the rest of his letters, are exaggerations. In support of this view, I note that in Romans Paul retracts or modifies some of what he said in Galatians. We may also find anger in the absence of a thanksgiving (see immediately below), in the repeated cursing of his opponents (1:8-9), and in his wish that his enemies would mutilate their own genitals (5:12). The statement that the law was ordained by angels

(3:20)—therefore not by God—is an exaggeration of his most negative view of the law, since throughout his correspondence he quotes Jewish Scripture as true and as revealing God’s own will.

As I mentioned above, it is probable that the anger or agitation that Paul shows in the harsh letter to Corinth (2 Cor. 10–13) is in part explained by the probability that the news from Galatia reached him while he was still engaged with the crisis in Corinth.¹

But despite the aspects of the letter that appear to me to be signs of anger, we do not know for certain that he was angry when he dictated the letter. Possibly the tone is that of icy calm; or perhaps the appearance of anger was a calculated rhetorical tactic. I shall treat the letter as angry, and as sincerely angry, but others may wish to experiment with other readings.

Paul’s Rebuke of His Converts in Galatia

Paul’s displeasure appears in the very first verses. In all of his other surviving letters, these are the introductory elements:

1. Paul’s own name and reference to the colleagues who are with him
2. The addressees
3. The blessing (“grace to you and peace”)
4. The thanksgiving (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:4, “I give thanks to my God always for you . . .”)

Galatians has the first three elements: (1) Paul and those with him; (2) to the churches of Galatia; (3) grace to you and peace. But the thanksgiving is replaced by this: “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel!” This is followed by a reiterated

1. See p. 417 n. 6.

curse on those who preach another gospel (1:8–9). Astonishment and curses have replaced the thanksgiving.

There are other indications that Paul is greatly exercised: his oath in 1:20 (“before God, I do not lie!”), and his statement that those who accept circumcision are “severed from Christ” and have “fallen away from grace” (5:4). This is a very extreme reaction to the news that he had opponents in Galatia if one compares other passages on being circumcised (1 Cor. 7:19; Rom. 2:25–3:4).

The Views of Paul’s Opponents

Besides noting the signs of hostility and aggravation, and working these into our reading of Galatians, it is also necessary to employ “mirror reading”: attributing to the Galatians (or to outsiders who have come to Galatia and who oppose Paul) the positions that he most vociferously opposes.² For every negative in Galatians 1–2, explicit or implied, we should assume that someone holds the position that he denounces. That there *is* someone who opposes Paul is completely clear:

If we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be accursed. As we have said before, so now I repeat, if anyone proclaims to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let that one be accursed! (1:8–9)

In this opening section of the letter, a list of contrary positions can be derived from the following verses:

1. In 1:1, Paul asserts that he was “sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father.” From this we infer that someone

2. On mirror reading, see p. 165 above; John M. G. Barclay, “Mirror-Reading a Polemical Letter: Galatians as a Test Case,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 31 (1987): 73–93.

accused him of being an apostle of secondary importance, dependent on human authority. (To catch the tone, say loudly, “*not* by human commission . . . *but* through Jesus Christ.”) Several subsequent statements show that someone accused him of being dependent on the authority of others. Thus 1:11-12: “the gospel that was proclaimed by me is *not* of human origin; for I did *not* receive it from a human source, *nor* was I taught it, *but* I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ”; 1:15-17: “When God . . . revealed his son to me . . . I did *not* confer with flesh and blood, *nor* did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me” (emphasis added). Paul continues by stating that after three years he went to Jerusalem to see Peter (Cephas),³ but that he “did *not* see any other apostle except James the Lord’s brother,” and he adds, “In what I am writing to you, before God I *do not lie*!” (1:18-20). The oath proves beyond doubt that Paul was answering charges; he was accused of being a secondhand and second-rate apostle, and this charge is one of his principal concerns in chapter 1.

2. In 1:10, Paul asserts that he is not “trying to please people,” from which we learn that someone said that he was.
3. According to 2:2, fourteen years after his first visit to Jerusalem he again went there, this time “in response to a revelation”; this probably means that someone said that he had been sent for. He wishes to assert that he attended the meeting with Peter and others because God wanted him to meet with them, not because the church in Jerusalem gave him his marching orders. This point is closely related to no. 1 above.
4. On his second trip to Jerusalem, when he met with Peter and James (to discuss circumcision of gentiles), his assistant, Titus,

3. On the equation of “Cephas” and “Peter,” see above, pp. 83-84.

“was *not* compelled to be circumcised, though he was a Greek” (2:3). This could mean that the “false brothers” (2:4)⁴ tried unsuccessfully to have Titus circumcised, or that Titus was not “forced,” but rather volunteered.⁵ In either case, something happened in Jerusalem with regard to Titus and circumcision to which Paul needed to reply. This is the first reference to the main issue of the letter: circumcision.

5. The “pillar” apostles in Jerusalem—Paul now includes John as well as Peter and James the brother of the Lord—“added nothing” to Paul’s mission (2:6), which probably indicates that he was accused of modifying his message under compulsion from the Jerusalem leaders or that his opponents were seeking to “add something” to his message. Paul’s positive assertion of his independence continues: the pillar apostles saw that he had been “entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel for the circumcised.” Therefore they “gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.” They did, however, make a condition: “that we remember the poor” by collecting money for Jerusalem. Paul states that he was eager to do this (2:7-10).
6. It is not certain that the next passage, 2:11-14, is Paul’s refutation of an erroneous report concerning himself, but still Paul wishes to put the matter straight. Peter (“Cephas”) had come to Antioch while Paul was there. Antioch was a mixed church, with some

4. The NRSV has “false believers,” which is substantially correct.

5. At this point Paul’s syntax is mangled, which led F. C. Burkitt to comment, “who can doubt that it was the knife which really did circumcise Titus that has cut the syntax of Gal. 2:3-5 to pieces?” For the quotation and a sympathetic view of the position that Titus was circumcised, see George S. Duncan, *The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians*, Moffat New Testament Commentary (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1934), 41-48, quotation p. 43. The argument is that Paul yielded in the case of Titus for strategic reasons but resisted the principle that gentile converts must be circumcised. Scholarly opinion overwhelmingly insists that Titus was not circumcised, but certainty is unobtainable.

Jews and some gentiles. At first Peter ate with the gentiles, but “certain men came from James,” and thereafter Peter, “fearing the circumcision party,” withdrew from the gentiles. The other Jewish members went with Peter. This was wrong, and Paul rebuked Peter publically. Possibly someone had said that Paul had agreed with Peter.

The reader who has reached Gal. 2:11–14 has already covered difficult and complicated terrain. It is absolutely clear that Paul himself was under attack and that he was responding; thus items 1–5 immediately above, and possibly number 6. It is also clear that the circumcision of gentiles was at issue. Paul does not refer to circumcision until 2:3 (the case of Titus), but it becomes evident that this was at the heart of the problem: should gentiles who believed in Jesus become Jews by accepting circumcision? But food and meals were also problems: could Jewish and gentile Christians eat together? What about observing special days, such as the Sabbath? “Days” will come up later in Galatians, and in Romans, Sabbath observance will be included in the list of aspects of Judaism that some people wished gentile converts to observe.

In general, the situation was this: Paul was converting gentiles but was not requiring them to become Jewish; others within the Christian movement did not agree, and they wanted to force gentile converts, including especially Paul’s gentile converts, to accept circumcision and other aspects of the Mosaic law that set Jews apart from gentiles. Paul’s opponents held that gentile Christians who wanted to belong to Jesus Christ had to become Jewish as well.

I have found it useful to describe this issue in general terms—*getting into* the right group (those who will be saved) and *staying in* the right group.⁶ In Galatians (as we shall see), Paul and his opponents agree

6. The categories of being “in” and being “out,” while being quite appropriate in discussing

that descent from Abraham puts one in the “in group.” Jews are born into this group and Paul argues that his gentile converts have entered the group. In ordinary Judaism, those who are in the “in group” stay in it by observing the law and repenting of transgressions. This is called “being righteous.”

But according to Jewish law, gentiles who want to be in the “in group” (descendants of Abraham) must become Jewish, first by being circumcised (the entry rite) and by agreeing to obey the Jewish law—in the Diaspora, especially those laws that set Jews off from gentiles, which were Sabbath and food laws. Paul vociferously disagreed: gentiles could join the people of God by faith in Christ and need not accept circumcision, the Sabbath, or the food laws. (Circumcision was the crucial issue; but “Days” and the food laws fall into the same category as circumcision: required distinguishing characteristics of Jews in the Diaspora [Gal. 4:10 and Rom. 14:1–6].)

The Pre-Galatians History of the Debate Over Circumcision: Who Did What Where?

Later passages reveal that in Galatians 2 Paul is rehearsing earlier events because his enemies have achieved influence in Galatia; thus, for example, 5:2, “if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you”: someone is trying to persuade the Galatian converts to be circumcised. In chapters 3–5, there is a complicated set of arguments in favor of Paul’s practice of not requiring gentiles to become Jews. Before we press on to consider these chapters, however, it will be helpful to sort out the people, the places, and the events. We shall see that Paul has in mind three times and places, unified by the same theme: the status of his gentile converts.

I shall organize this discussion by place. When Paul wrote

Judaism and Christianity, are not issues in all religions. In both Judaism and Christianity, it is possible to join the religion, or to renounce it, or to be expelled, “cut off.”

Galatians he was under attack in Galatia, presumably by Jewish Christians who put forward the views that he opposes in this letter and to whom he refers as “false brothers.” But it was not just in Galatia that he was under attack, and he saw previous events in Jerusalem and Antioch as relevant to the problem in Galatia.

Two Trips to Jerusalem (Galatians 1:17–2:10)

Jesus’ disciples, though they were from Galilee, had made Jerusalem the center of their activity while they awaited the return of the Lord. We have seen that Paul refers to two groups there: the “pillar” apostles (Peter, James, and John; see 2:2, 6, 9) and the “false brothers” (2:4); these were Christians who opposed his practice of admitting gentiles to the Christian movement without requiring them also to become Jewish. According to Paul, his mission was independent of Jerusalem; this was contrary to the view of his opponents (and also contrary to the depiction of Acts), but he strongly asserts that he was called by God directly and that he had been to Jerusalem only twice before writing Galatians.

The first time he met only two apostles—Peter and James, the Lord’s brother (1:19). This is the subject of his oath, sworn before God (1:20: he did not meet the other apostles). Paul then preached in Syria and Cilicia, but he remained generally unknown to members of the Christian movement in Judea (1:21–22). The first visit was apparently limited to his becoming acquainted with the two leading figures of the Christian movement, but doubtless it was also the source of some of his knowledge about Jesus.

Paul’s second visit to Jerusalem was controversial (2:1–10). Barnabas joined Paul for this trip, and Paul also took Titus (a gentile) with him. We have seen his description of this “conference,” which is often called “the apostolic conference.”⁷ The “false brothers” wanted to *compel* Titus to be circumcised; Paul resisted. “Those who were

reputed to be something”—that is, the “pillars” (2:9)—“added nothing” to Paul (2:6), and in fact they supported his position on the conversion of gentiles: he could do as he wished with regard to circumcision. To seal the bargain, Paul would take up a collection for the poor Christians in Jerusalem.

We need to consider Paul’s attitude toward these “pillar apostles”—James, Peter, and John. His estimate of them was somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, he refers to them sarcastically and negatively. In Gal. 2:6 he calls them “those believed to be something,” to which he adds, “what they were does not matter to me—God shows no partiality.” Later he refers to them as “those who are believed to be pillars” (2:9). He may have the same people in mind at the end of Galatians, where he refers to “those who are nothing [but] believe themselves to be something” (6:3; *dokei einai ti*, which is very close to *dokountōn einai ti* in 2:6).

On the other hand, he wishes to distinguish the “pillar” apostles from his enemies in Jerusalem, the “false brothers” (Gal. 2:4; cf. 2 Cor. 11:26). More telling, since one of his arguments in Galatians is that the pillar apostles agreed with him, he clearly thinks that this counts in his favor. He is glad to have their agreement and support. The three leaders “recognized the grace” that God had bestowed on Paul and agreed that he and Barnabas should convert gentiles (2:9).

There is a more complicated story about Peter and James in 2:11–14, which we shall consider below. Thus far we see that, despite tension and possibly some animosity, he wanted the esteem and the support of the leaders in Jerusalem, the “pillar apostles.”

We do not know who the “false brothers” were (2:4).⁸ When I’m

7. We saw above that this conference, which included all of the leaders as well as dissidents (the “false brethren”) cannot be equated with either of the conferences described in Acts 11 and 15.

8. Paul also mentions “false apostles” as one of his tribulations in 2 Cor. 11:26. We do not know whether these were the same false apostles as in Galatians. The issue of circumcision does not appear in 2 Corinthians.

in a mischievous mood, I sometimes like to suggest that they were the other eight surviving disciples of Jesus besides Peter and John (Judas and James the son of Zebedee were dead). The truth is that we do not know. Probably there were only a few “false brothers,” since Paul says that they “slipped in” to his meeting with the pillars. Their view was that Titus should be circumcised.

In sum, Paul faced opposition to his mission from “false brethren,” but he had support from the pillar apostles. The main issue was whether or not Titus and other gentile converts should be circumcised.

Conflict in Antioch (Galatians 2:11-14)

It appears that during Paul’s lifetime, Antioch in Syria⁹ was the second most important center of Christianity. It held this status before Paul was converted. Syrian Antioch is mentioned thirteen times in Acts, principally in chapters 11 and 15. To the degree that Paul had a home base (he was usually on the road), it was probably Antioch rather than Jerusalem. We note that Peter “came” to Antioch (Gal. 2:11), but that Paul was already there; it seems to have been unusual for Peter to be in Antioch, but not unusual for Paul.

We noted above that the congregation at Antioch was mixed, with some Jews and some gentiles. This was probably quite rare at the time. The custom of the Christian congregations was for all members to eat together. Paul does not indicate how frequent such meals were. A reasonable guess would be that the Christian community observed the Lord’s Supper each time it met, probably once a week. The Lord’s Supper was a real meal (1 Cor. 11:20-22). Peter at first joined the common meal, but then some people came from James (the brother

9. “Antiochus” was the name of several of the Hellenistic kings descended from Seleucus I, who followed Alexander the Great, and there were several “Antiochs” in the ancient world. Two of them figure in the New Testament: Antioch in Syria and Antioch near Pisidia in Asia Minor.

of the Lord; James the disciple was dead),¹⁰ and Peter withdrew and would eat only with Jews (Gal. 2:12). The other Jewish Christians in Antioch went with him—even Barnabas, Paul noted with pain (2:13). Paul rebuked Peter, but we do not know the outcome. Possibly the “circumcision party” whom Peter “feared” (2:12) prevailed. Paul may have lost the battle in Antioch, just as he may have lost the churches in Galatia.

Why did Peter withdraw from eating with the gentile Christians? It seems that the people who came from James said something to him that led to his withdrawal (2:12). This answer, while probably true, only raises other questions: What did they say? Why did they say it? Did they speak on their own initiative, or did they communicate a message from James? We cannot answer the last question at all, and there is little point in trying to guess. If James had heard of Peter’s behavior, and had sent emissaries to correct it, we would have to suppose that Peter stayed in Antioch for an extended period of time, and this may be the case. But leaving this question open, let us say that the “people who came from James” spoke as James’s representatives, whether or not James had explicitly told them what to say. The result of what they said led Peter to stop eating with the gentile Christians.

What was the objection from the point of view of James and his aides? We also do not know the answer to this, but it is worthwhile to explain some of the possibilities that scholars have proposed.¹¹

1. Perhaps the common meals at Antioch transgressed the biblical (kosher) food laws, and so Jews in the church at Antioch were breaking explicit divine commandments. I shall briefly

10. On James the brother of the Lord, see pp. 85–86.

11. See James D. G. Dunn, “The Incident at Antioch (Gal. 2:11–18),” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 18 (1983): 3–57, who pointed out that too little attention had been given to these various possibilities.

summarize the forbidden categories of food according to Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14.¹²

- a. The Bible excludes meat from quadrupeds that do not both chew the cud and “part the hoof” (that is, have a cloven hoof). Basically, the only permitted red meat comes from goats, sheep, cattle, and deer. Few peoples have eaten dogs, cats, or donkeys. The most popular red meat in the ancient world, however, was pork, and the Bible excludes pork, since swine do not chew the cud.
- b. The Bible also excludes birds of prey and scavengers (eagles, vultures, etc.). Doves and pigeons were the principal birds that were permitted. Chickens had not yet made their appearance in Palestine and Europe.
- c. Fish whose bones were outside their bodies were also forbidden—shrimp, oysters, and the like.
- d. Most insects and other “swarming things” (serpents, lizards, weasels, and the like) were forbidden, though insects that “have legs above their feet” were permitted (locusts, crickets, and grasshoppers).
- e. Jews were forbidden to eat the fat and blood of animals.
- f. Though this is not actually a biblical law,¹³ few Jews would eat meat derived from animals that had been sacrificed to a gentile god or goddess. In discussing 1 Corinthians 8 and 10, we saw that this was a major topic in the Diaspora, since Greek and Roman sacrifices often produced excessive meat,

12. See the more detailed summary in Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief* (London: SCM, 1992), 214–17.

13. The biblical law is that Israelites must not have graven images and must not bow down to them or worship them (that is, sacrifice to them): Exod. 20:4–5; Deut. 5:8. The sacrifices of Egypt and Canaan did not produce excess food that was then sold in the market, and so the issue of eating such food did not arise in the Hebrew Bible. This became an issue in the Greek-speaking Diaspora.

which was then sold in the market.

Outside Palestine, where more animals were available, Jews followed the same principles while enlarging the lists. According to the Septuagint (translated in Egypt), the water buffalo of Egypt and the giraffe were permitted, since they chew the cud and part the hoof (Deut. 14:4–5 LXX). Philo (also an Egyptian Jew) added cranes and geese to edible fowls (*Spec. Laws* 4.117).

2. The second possibility is that Jews regarded gentiles as impure and would under no circumstances eat with them.
3. Perhaps the food was kosher, but it had not been tithed, or it had not been handled in purity.
4. Eating with gentiles might damage Peter's reputation as chief apostle to the circumcised, since many Jews suspected that gentiles would import some form of idolatry into meals (e.g., by pouring out a bit of wine as a libation to a pagan deity).

It is dubious that the problem was the food itself (1.a–f above), since it is doubtful that Paul would happily have dined on pork, shellfish, meat with blood in it, or meat offered to idols. The only direct evidence is his reluctance to accept meat offered to idols in 1 Corinthians 8, 10 (above, pp. 330–31). But we must note that in general Paul's views of behavior were Jewish, and he was doubtless brought up to *abhor* pork, shellfish, bloody meat, and the like. The forbidden foods of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 are called "abominable" (e.g., Lev. 11:11, 20; Deut. 14:3), and most Jews would have regarded pork with approximately the same feeling of loathing that we would now feel if offered dog stew.

The same is true if we look at this topic through Peter's eyes: I doubt that he would *ever* have dined with gentiles if it meant eating

pork, meat offered to idols, or blood.¹⁴ Separating himself from the abominable meats would not have required the advice of James's representatives.

I have discussed the second and third possibilities extensively elsewhere,¹⁵ and here I shall save space. Neither the impurity of gentiles nor purity and tithing laws would have affected meals in Antioch. With regard to the purity of people (no. 2 in the list above), it is true that gentiles were not allowed into the inner courts of the temple, which shows that they were regarded as being impure in some way or other,¹⁶ but all Jews in the Diaspora were also impure, since they all suffered from corpse impurity, which could be removed only at the temple. Thus the Jewish Christians in Antioch were already impure.¹⁷

Moreover, the Jewish literature that discusses eating with gentiles always focuses on the food, never on the people. For example, according to the *Letter of Aristeas*, the strict Jews who were translating the Bible into Greek regularly dined with the king of Egypt and his court (*Let. Aris.* 181–94). The king's kitchen prepared the food according to Jewish requirements, and Jews and gentiles ate it together.¹⁸

14. According to Acts 10, Peter received a vision in which God revealed that all foods were clean. Peter was puzzled by this vision (Acts 10:17), but the issue is clarified in Acts: it meant that the Jerusalem apostles should accept gentile converts without requiring them to observe Jewish food laws. This is not evidence that the Jewish apostles themselves started breaking the food laws.

15. See Sanders, "Jewish Association with Gentiles and Galatians 2:11–14," in *The Conversation Continues*, ed. Robert Fortna and Beverly Gaventa (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 170–87; "Purity, Food and Offerings in the Greek-Speaking Diaspora," in *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah* (London: SCM, 1990), 255–308.

16. Sanders, *Practice and Belief*, 72–76.

17. Friends and families of dead people, in caring for the body and burying it, or entering the room where the person had died, all contracted corpse impurity. When Diaspora Jews made pilgrimage to Jerusalem, they had to have corpse impurity removed (which required seven days) before entering the temple. On corpse impurity, see, e.g., *ibid.*, index s.v. "corpse impurity."

18. For further passages, see Sanders, "Jewish Association with Gentiles," 176–85, esp. 179–80; Tessa Rajak, "Jews and Christians as Groups in a Pagan World," in *To See Ourselves as Others*

With regard to tithing and purity laws (no. 3 above), tithing applied only to Jewish farmers who grew food in Jewish Palestine.¹⁹ It was a non-issue in the Diaspora. Nor do we know of any purity laws, such as handwashing or immersion, that governed Jewish meals in the Diaspora.²⁰

This leaves us with number 4 above, the suspicion that Jews who associated too closely with gentiles would come into contact with idolatrous practices. I think that this was probably the problem. It is doubtful that the difficulty foreseen by James's agents was strictly *legal*, more likely that it was a question of *reputation*. We may again consider Peter's probable view prior to the visit of James's people; it is most dubious that he would have willingly broken a specific biblical law. But many Jews feared idolatry and thus wished to restrict association with gentiles: they did not want to associate with gentiles *too much*, lest somehow they be brought into contact with idolatry. How much is too much? Different families and groups of Jews had different views.

I shall give just one example: When he was a young man (twenty-six years old), Josephus, who was a priest and who observed the Jewish law, undertook an embassy to Rome to persuade Nero to release some Jewish priests whom he had imprisoned. Josephus sailed on a gentile ship, met a Jewish actor who was a favorite of Nero, and thereby gained an introduction to Poppaea, Nero's wife, and persuaded her to aid his cause. She did so, and Josephus's mission was a success (*Life* 13–16). I assume that traveling on a gentile ship to a gentile land, mixing with the passengers and the crowds in Rome, and talking with a gentile aristocrat was in his case not *too*

See Us: *Jews, Christians, "Others" in Late Antiquity*, ed. Jacob Neusner and Ernest Frerichs (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 247–62.

19. Sanders, "Jewish Association with Gentiles," 172; Sanders, *Jewish Law*, 285–308.

20. *Ibid.*, 258–71.

much contact with gentiles. Would he have eaten with gentiles? With whom did he eat on the ship? He may have managed to stay in a Jewish house in Rome, but still he had to meet numerous gentiles in close quarters.

Other Jews were even more intimate with gentiles. Some Jewish young men attended gentile schools in the Diaspora.²¹ Some doubtless mingled much less. There was no law that regulated contact with pagans, but observant Jews did have to decide how intimate they should be with them, granted the general Jewish apprehension of coming into close contact with idolatry.

My view, then, is that this was the problem in Antioch. Peter, chief apostle to Jews, should be *above suspicion*. Not only must he avoid idolatry, but in order to fulfill his office he must be a loyal Jew, and he must also be *seen* to be a loyal Jew, which meant that he should avoid excessive contact with gentiles. In some cases, appearance is as important as a strictly legal question: on some issues, not only must one do the right thing, one must also be seen to do the right thing. I suggest that James's emissaries wanted Peter to preserve appearances. It was all right for him to live temporarily in a predominantly gentile city and to meet with gentile converts to the Christian movement. It was *legally* all right for him to eat with gentiles, but doing so might lead to questions. It was hard enough to persuade Jews to accept Jesus. Why should Peter add doubts about how close his association with gentiles was?

Paul wrote that Peter's behavior in Antioch "compelled the Gentiles to live like Jews" (2:14). According to Paul's own narrative

21. There is evidence of a first-century Jewish member of a city council in Cyrene, of Jewish attendance at the theatre of Miletus in the second or third century, and of Jewish ephebes (students) in Cyrene in the first century—to name only some of the major ways in which Jews associated with gentiles in the Diaspora. These activities included at least passive contact with idolatry, and they show willingness to overlook formal, civic idolatry in order to participate in the broader civilization. See Rajak, "Jews and Christians as Groups," 247–62.

of the event, however, Peter (followed by other Jewish Christians) only withdrew from the gentiles and thereby effected a separation. Probably the result of this separation was to put pressure on the gentile Christians in Antioch: to eat with Peter when he visited, they would have to become Jewish—that is, be circumcised. In any case, Paul creates a parallel between the two situations that he describes. The “false brothers” in *Jerusalem* wanted to *compel* Titus to be circumcised (2:3), and Peter’s behavior in *Antioch* *compelled* the gentile Christians to live like Jews (2:14)—which was tantamount to accepting circumcision. We shall now see that the opponents in Galatia wanted to *compel* the Galatians to accept circumcision. These verses contain three of the four uses of “compel” (*anagkazō*) in Paul’s letters (the fourth is 2 Cor. 12:11).

To sum it up, in Antioch Peter at first ate with gentiles but then withdrew when emissaries from James arrived. His influence compelled other Jewish Christians also to withdraw from table fellowship with gentile Christians. Paul rebuked Peter severely (described below).

We cannot know any more than what Paul tells us about these two events (the conference in Jerusalem; Peter’s behavior in Antioch), and since he does not go into detail we cannot explain what was going through Peter’s mind, or who the false brethren were, or what their full program included. We can see quite clearly, however, that *to Paul* these two events were *parallel to his problem in Galatia*.²² All three had to do with circumcision and *compulsion*, attempted compulsion, or indirect compulsion. We shall see that Paul takes a different view of circumcision when compulsion is not a factor.

22. On Paul’s exaggeration regarding Peter, see immediately below.

Galatia: Circumcision and the Law (Galatians 5:2-6; 5:12; 6:12-15)

After Gal. 2:14, Paul begins a long and continuous argument that runs to 3:29. We shall return to the exegesis of that section of Galatians in the next chapter. First I wish to complete the discussion of circumcision and the law as it appears in various passages in Galatians. I shall print in full the passages that directly refer to circumcision in Galatia:

Listen! I, Paul, am telling you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to you. Once again I testify to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obliged to obey the entire law. You who want to be justified [better, “righteoused,” as we shall see below] by the law have cut yourselves off from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit, by faith, we eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love. (Gal. 5:2-6)

I wish those who unsettle you would castrate themselves! (5:12)

It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that try to *compel* you to be circumcised—only that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. Even the circumcised do not themselves obey the law, but they want you to be circumcised so that they may boast about your flesh. . . . For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything! (6:12-15)

In case there was any doubt, these verses contain the explicit proof that the issue in Galatia was circumcision, which (as we shall see) is the principal “work of the law” that Paul rejects. The connection between circumcision and the Jewish law is made in 5:3 and 6:13: if the Galatians accept circumcision, they become Jewish and will be subject to the entire Jewish law, but even the would-be circumcisers do not themselves always obey the law. We are not sure to whom the

last remark applies, but Paul represents himself as saying something of the sort to Peter in Antioch: “if you, though a Jew, live like a gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the gentiles to live like Jews?” (2:14). This does not prove that Peter was the opponent who had gone to Galatia; Paul might have been able to say the same thing about a lot of people, and we must remember that Peter had supported Paul in Jerusalem.

“Those who unsettle you” (5:12) is a reference to Paul’s opponents in Galatia; the wish that they would mutilate their own genitals makes it clear that they wish to circumcise the Galatians. Paul refers to the opposition several times in the plural: “some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ” (1:7); “they make much of you, but for no good purpose” (4:17); “those who want to make a good showing in the flesh” (6:12-13, quoted more fully above). Strikingly, Paul sometimes refers to a single opponent in Galatia: “who has bewitched you?” (3:1); “who has prevented you from obeying the truth?” (5:7); “whoever it is that is confusing you will pay the penalty” (5:10).

In all these and other passages, “you” refers to the Galatians whom Paul had previously converted. It appears that one or more outsiders have come in and urged the Galatians to be circumcised. The wording also suggests that Paul did not know the identity of his opponent or opponents. It is also possible, however, that he knew who he was, or who they were, and preferred not to be explicit.

In 6:12, these people are also accused of wanting to make an outward show so that they will not *be persecuted*. This implies the existence of a group of persecutors or would-be persecutors *behind* the person or people who are “troubling” and “confusing” the Galatians. We would love to know who the persecutors were. We note that Paul had once persecuted the church (Gal. 1:13, 23) and that in the allegory of chapter 4 (described below), the one born

according to the flesh persecuted the one born according to the Spirit (4:29). Most interestingly, Paul writes in 5:11 that if he *still* preached circumcision he would not be persecuted. We do not know whether or not these five references to persecution (1:13, 23; 4:29; 5:11; 6:12) all have the same explanation: was it always opposition to circumcision that led some non-Christian Jews to persecute those Christian Jews who opposed circumcision of gentiles?

This is clearly the case in 5:11 and 6:12. I suspect that in the Diaspora the question of circumcising gentile converts was always a factor in Jewish persecution of Jewish Christians. (The persecution of the followers of Jesus in Jerusalem had other causes.)

Above I briefly outlined two possible explanations of Jewish persecution of Jewish Christians, including Jewish apostles of Christianity (pp. 194–95, items 3 and 4). Possibly they thought that Christianity was a rogue movement that might damage Judaism and mislead gentiles. Moreover, Jews might fear that Rome would object to a new eschatological cult and punish Jews—not distinguishing non-Christian Jews from Christian Jews. I shall now add a third possible motive for Jewish persecution of the Christians and elaborate on the issue of eschatology as a reason for persecution.

If gentiles who had not been circumcised claimed to be heirs of God's promises to Abraham and his descendants, they might also claim all of the privileges that Roman rulers had bestowed on the Jews, such as exemption from military service and not being required to work or go to court on the Sabbath. Such claims would lead to deep resentment on the part of Jews, and an extension of such privileges to gentiles who had converted to Christianity might lead to a gentile backlash against Jews.

The eschatology of the Christian movement may have frightened Diaspora Jews for reasons put forward by Paula Fredriksen. As she explained, preaching a messiah who had been executed as a

troublemaker, “combined with the vision of the approaching End,” which was “preached also to Gentiles” would be dangerous.²³ Even if waiting for a messiah did not lead to actions that threatened the *Pax Romana*, expectation of the end can disrupt society as people withdraw from their usual occupations to wait. Such expectations have proved disruptive more than once in history. Ordinary Jews did not want these charismatic enthusiasts to give Rome the idea that the Jewish communities in the empire were fomenting social or political unrest. If the Christian movement did bring on a Roman response, the Romans presumably would not differentiate the Christian movement from Judaism, and worldwide Judaism might suffer.

Some or all of these objections to the Christian movement might well have led Diaspora Jews (such as Paul before his conversion) to persecute and attempt to drive out Jews who became Christian (such as Paul after his conversion).

In Gal. 5:6 (“in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything”) and 6:15 (“neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything!”), Paul returns to the position of 1 Cor. 7:19: “circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing.” But despite these words, it is no longer true that circumcision is indifferent: Gal. 5:6 (neither circumcision nor uncircumcision matters) comes immediately after Paul’s statement that accepting circumcision results in being cut off from Christ and falling away from grace (Gal. 5:2, 5). That is quite a difference. And the entirety of the letter shows that Paul is very hostile to the possibility that his converts will accept circumcision. Obviously in at least one context—entry into the people of God—circumcision or uncircumcision matters a great deal.

23. Paula Fredriksen, “Judaism, the Circumcision of Gentiles, and the Apocalyptic Hope: Another Look at Galatians 1 and 2,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 42/2 (1991): 556.

I believe that this puzzle (is circumcision a matter of indifference or is it wrong for gentile converts?) has an easy solution: Paul's original position was that circumcision does not matter, except that it is better not to change (so 1 Cor. 7). When, however, some people tried to *compel* Paul's converts to be circumcised, they thereby *implied*—and possibly they directly stated—that Paul's message had failed to bring them to salvation. His version of the gospel was inadequate, and he was misguided at best. In these circumstances—attempted compulsion to make Paul's converts do what he regarded as unnecessary—circumcision was entirely wrong. Accepting it meant rejecting him and his gospel and acting as if faith in Christ was not sufficient.

Thus I think that a lot of the weight of the letter rests on *compulsion* regarding membership in the people of God. That is the word that Paul uses to link together the events in Jerusalem (some would *compel* Titus to be circumcised), Antioch (Peter would *compel* the gentiles to live like Jews), and Galatia (Paul's enemies would *compel* his gentile converts to be circumcised).

As we now see the matter, saying that Peter “compelled” the gentiles of Antioch to live like Jews is an exaggeration. But Paul was looking at the issue through the lens of his problem in Galatia, and he saw Peter's withdrawal from table fellowship with gentile Christians as tending toward and supporting the policy of the people who were trying to compel gentile converts to be circumcised and thereby destroy his mission.

Thus I understand the two references to the indifference of circumcision in Gal. 5:6 and 6:15 to be attempts late in the letter to get the readers to see the situation in the true perspective. It is as if Paul said, “In truth, circumcision does not matter, it only matters because you are being compelled and I am being attacked.”

As we have seen, circumcision is the entry rite of males into the

people of Israel and is a requirement for membership in the chosen people (pp. 460–61 above). It is a “work of the law” (Gal. 2:16; 3:2, 5, 10; 5:19; 6:4). It is not, however, the sort of “work” that someone might boast of as a human achievement that earns God’s favor and stores up merit. At the age of eight days, males are not thinking of achievement and rarely boast of their merits.

Nor is circumcision a “good deed,” comparable to giving alms. Paul lists good deeds as the “fruit of the Spirit” in Gal. 5:22–23, and he is entirely in favor of them—as always. Good deeds are good; but compulsion to be circumcised is not. We shall see more fully below that Paul designates as “works of law” those commandments that distinguish Jew from gentile in the Diaspora. He does not call such laws “good deeds.”²⁴

Rather than being a “good deed,” circumcision of an adult is a major commitment that shows that the male wishes to be Jewish and live in accordance with the law of Moses. That is a commitment that Paul did not want his gentile converts to make.

As we saw briefly above (pp. 56–68), Jews in the Diaspora were distinguished from gentiles in a few major ways: (a) Jews did not worship other gods and especially not graven images; (b) the males were circumcised; (c) Jews would not eat certain foods, most famously pork and shellfish; (d) Jews observed the Sabbath and other holy days (such as the Day of Atonement). They did not observe the numerous pagan holy days. Throughout the Roman Empire, Jews were allowed not to participate in the civic religion, which, in the eyes of the populace, safeguarded the city.

24. James D. G. Dunn has stated the matter precisely: “Paul evidently did not associate ‘Works of law’ with ‘good works.’ The two phrases operated within different substructures of his thought. To both commend ‘good works’ and rail against ‘works of the law’ was no inconsistency for Paul.” See Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (London: T&T Clark, 1998), 365. On the apparent logical difficulty in deleting the “works of law” from the commandments of God, see below, pp. 696–98.

Of these distinguishing characteristics, Paul wanted his gentile converts to observe only (a): not to worship pagan deities. That and the worship of the God who sent Jesus was the extent to which his gentiles needed to be Jewish. The policy of his opponents, however, which was to make gentile converts Jewish by having them circumcised, would lead to their observing the rest of the Jewish law, such as food laws and Jewish holy days. Thus it is no surprise that Paul warns his converts that if they accept circumcision they will have to observe the rest of the Mosaic law, nor is it a surprise that he later explicitly mentions *days*: “You are observing [Jewish] days and months and seasons and years. I am afraid that my work for you may have been wasted” (4:10–11).

In a calm academic moment, Paul might have been able to discuss with others the pros and cons of circumcision.

- The prophetic passages about gentiles in the “days to come” do not require it;
- On the other hand, Abraham accepted it, and it distinguishes the people of God from pagans.
- But there’s no time to change from uncircumcised to circumcised.

But the *requirement* of circumcision for gentile converts to Christianity was not part of the Christian mission from the beginning, and regarding it as essential would invalidate the numerous conversions of gentiles—and, as I have emphasized, Paul’s own mission.

The sharp separation of “works of law” and “good deeds” in Paul’s letters is a major point of the present book. We shall see this in the next chapter (pp. 513–14), as well as in chapter 19 (pp. 560–61) and 22 (pp. 696–98). In chapter 19 (pp. 571–72), there is a list of passages

where Paul recommends good works. As we discuss each of these passages in its place, the point will become ever clearer.

Galatians, Part 3: Paul's Main Argument

Introduction

We now come to what I called above “one long argument.” The main argument runs from Gal. 2:14 to 3:29. Supplementary arguments conclude with Gal. 5:6. The long argument has several component parts, and in the exegesis that follows I shall make as many subdivisions as possible, trying to make each subdivision bite-sized. Even so, some of the “bites” involve difficulties, especially for the reader who does not know Greek. There are problems of translation and of grammar that must be explained, despite the tedium involved. The whole of the “long argument” will eventually become clear. The argument of 2:14–3:29 is crucially important for the understanding of Paul's most important theological points, which will reappear in Romans, and achieving that goal is worth a lot of hard work.

In the first section (2:14–21), Paul begins to work out

“righteousness by faith” and “being one with Christ Jesus,” and it is in these verses that we meet the problems of translation and grammar.

As I admonished above, we must distinguish four topics: what the question was, what Paul’s conclusion was, how he argued for his conclusion, and why he had come to it. Moreover, we need to continue to exercise “mirror reading” in order to distinguish the arguments of Paul’s opponents from his own views. We shall see that the main issue is that of *membership*: who is in the “in group” and who is not.

Galatians 2:14-21: Paul’s Rebuke of Peter

Having discussed Galatians 1 and part of chapter 2 above (pp. 475–91), we now return to the point at which Paul accuses Peter of compelling gentiles to live like Jews. This begins with 2:14, where he seems to quote his rebuke of Peter: “When I saw that they were not acting consistently with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, ‘If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?’” He continues, “we ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners” (v. 15), and the apparent quotation runs to the end of 2:21.

We must ask whether or not all eight verses (2:14–21) do in fact represent precisely what he said to Peter on the fateful day. Because ancient Greek manuscripts do not have quotation marks—nor any other form of punctuation—it is up to the judgment of the translator or commentator to put them in as needed. As the passage continues from verse 15 to verse 21, it begins to seem more and more like a homily, rather than a spontaneous rebuke, and some scholars end the quotation after verse 14 (as do the RSV, the NRSV, and the NEB). The NIV and the JB both continue the quotation to the end of verse 21 (“I do not nullify the grace of God . . .”).

It appears that Paul started off by recalling his rebuke to Peter, but

then decided to explain the issue. J. B. Lightfoot elegantly stated the mixture of what Paul actually said to Peter with Paul's later thoughts about it: "St. Paul's narrative in fact loses itself in the reflexions suggested by it. Text and comment are so blended together that they cannot be separated without violence."¹ This blending, however, may have been sequential: it seems probable that the quotation of what Paul had said comes first in the text as we now have it, and that the reflections come later in the passage. Thus I would follow the NRSV and the NEB and close the quotation after 2:14. But whatever one's decision about how much of this passage he said to Peter on that memorable day in Antioch, it is undoubted that in 2:15-21 Paul is saying what he deeply believes.

Galatians 2:16: The Introduction of "Righteousness by Faith"

After "not Gentile sinners" (Gal. 2:15), Paul introduces the concept of righteousness by faith for the first time in the surviving correspondence. The verse immediately raises problems of translation that we need to sort out. The translation is difficult because in English we do not have all the words we need to represent what Paul wrote. This is one of the passages in which the English translation makes Paul's argument invisible to the reader, and we shall have the same problem of translation in Gal. 3:6-9. We saw a previous case in which the English translation was opaque in 1 Cor. 15:44-49.

Three Problems of Translation

The first difficulty is how to translate the Greek verb (*dikaioō*) that is cognate with the noun *righteousness* (*dikaïosynē*). The second is how to translate the Greek verb (*pisteuō*) that is cognate with the noun

1. J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (London and Cambridge: MacMillan and Co., 1865, 10th ed., 1890), 113-14.

faith (pistis). Since it is the intention of the book to address all of the puzzles in Paul's letters, I shall discuss these two translation problems in detail. Here, however, I shall give the result. In translating Paul's passages on righteousness by faith I shall reintroduce into English two verbs that dropped out a few centuries ago: "*to faith*" and "*to righteous*." The third problem is grammatical: how to understand the genitive in one of Paul's phrases, "faith *in*" or "faith *of* Christ."

This is the point in our explanation of Paul that will most severely test the patience of readers who have never translated from one language to another *and* who were not fortunate enough to learn the basic terminology of grammar when they were ten or twelve years old. For example, it will help to know the grammatical terms *active voice*, *passive voice*, and *parts of speech*, among others. Since the principal problem has to do with cognate words, I shall explain them in some detail.

Cognate words: two or more words have the same ancestry; that is, they are both formed from the same root. In the case of Gal. 2:16, the cognate words are different parts of speech.

As a warm-up exercise I offer some examples of cognate words that are different parts of speech: "the life [noun] I live [verb]," the song [n.] I sang [v.]," "speak [v.] the speech [n.], I pray you" (*Hamlet*, 3.2).

In these examples of verbs and nouns that are cognate, the verbs are in the active voice. The passive voice would be this: "my life is lived," "my song was sung," "the speech was spoken."

To assist us in understanding Paul, I shall offer a more advanced case: "We should console [v., active voice] the disconsolate [n.]." The passive voice would be "the disconsolate [n.] should be consoled [v.]."

Now imagine that "console the disconsolate" is German, French, or Sanskrit and that in English we have the noun translated "disconsolate" but not the verb translated "console." One might use

a synonym for the missing verb and translate “comfort the disconsolate.” In this case the translation would be accurate, since the verb *comfort* is a synonym for *console*.

If, however, we did not have a synonym for the missing verb, we might translate “console the disconsolate” as “make the disconsolate feel better.” This might be interpreted as “make their sense of touch better,” rather than “make their emotional, internal feeling better,” and scholars could argue about it.

The point is that if the translator’s language *lacks the equivalent of a foreign word*, he or she must search for a synonym to represent the original text. The synonym may or may not be as appropriate a translation as “comfort” is in our example.

1. *Righteousness*. That is what has happened in the translation and interpretation of Paul’s discussion of “righteousness by faith.” Paul sometimes uses a passive verb that is cognate with “righteousness” (literally, “be righteousnessed”), but modern English does not have that verb, and translators have used a synonym, the verb *to justify* (passive “to be justified”).

One of the problems of using the noun *righteousness*, the adjective *righteous*, and the verb *justify* is that Paul’s actual argument becomes totally invisible. We shall see this in full below.

In any case, “justified” is not a very good synonym for “righteoused.” *Justify* is no longer a strong word, and we need strong words. One of the main uses of “to justify” in modern English is this: to justify an action by offering a sufficient reason for that action. A man may claim that he was “justified” in using deadly force against someone else because he was scared. “Justify” or “justification” rather quickly descends to the meaning “offer an adequate excuse” for something. An “excuse” is quite a long way from Paul’s meaning, which is that “being righteousnessed by faith in Christ” *does something to*

the person, rather than simply providing him with an excuse for bad behavior.

“Justified,” however, has the advantage of supporting the Lutheran dogma that Christians are simultaneously sinners and “just” (righteous people), because God had declared them to be righteous. This is *fictional* or *imputed righteousness*, which is a bulwark of Protestant exegesis of Paul. Thus in this interpretation, supported by the inadequate synonym *justify*, *nothing happens to the person*; rather, he or she is simply declared innocent, not guilty, even though he or she continues to perform acts that make one guilty.

Paul thought that Christians were *changed*. It may be that in fact they were not, but he thought they were. We saw this extensively in 2 Corinthians 3–4 (pp. 408–13).

It would be closer to Paul’s meaning to translate the passive phrase “to be righteoused by faith” as “faith in Christ *makes a person righteous*.” In Gal. 2:16, the JB translates Paul’s Greek, which I have above rendered “a person is not righteoused by works of law,” as “what makes a man righteous is not obedience to the law.” Though it is an improvement on “justify,” I think that “to make righteous” still misses the meaning somewhat, since Paul does not have moral rectitude in mind.

The decisive proof of the actual meaning of “to be righteoused” in Paul’s letters will appear in the exegesis of Galatians 3. To avoid suspense: it turns out that “to be righteoused by faith” is a “transfer term,” which indicates that, by faith in Christ, one enters the “in group,” which we may call “the body of Christ.”

2. *Faith* and *believe*. Sad to say, we have the very same problem with *faith*. The noun in Greek has a cognate verb. In English we have no such verb, and so translators use *faith* when Paul’s word is a noun, but *believe* when he used a verb.

Believe, like *justify*, is a fairly weak word: it usually means “to hold an opinion about which one is not positive”: “I believe so, but I am not sure.” That is inadequate for Paul’s use of *pistis* (the Greek noun “faith”) and *pisteuō* (the Greek verb that I translate “to faith”). The noun *faith* is also much stronger than the noun *belief*. Paul’s “faith in Christ” means “trust in him entirely, put your destiny in his hands, and live as if Christ were *in* you—as in fact he is.” Faith in Christ, like being righteoused by faith, implies for Paul a change, a transformation, for the believer, not just agreeing to hold some opinion or other.

Switching from “faith” to “believe” in the same passage is as bad as switching from “right” to “just”: it makes Paul’s argument invisible. In Gal. 2:16, the NRSV shifts from “faith in Christ Jesus” to “have come to believe in Christ Jesus.” The JB goes from “faith in Jesus Christ” to “believers in Christ Jesus,” then back to “faith in Christ.” Paul wrote, “through faith in Christ Jesus” ... we have faithed in Christ Jesus.” One may consider this redundant or repetitive, but it is what he wrote. This time it is the NIV that tried to save the day by translating “put our faith in Jesus Christ . . . justified by faith in Christ.”

As I said above, to solve the problem of nouns that have no cognate verbs in English, I have introduced two verbs that are not present in modern English (as I shall explain below, they were once present in English but have dropped out). They are the verbs *to faith* and *to righteous* (active voice) or *to be righteoused* (passive voice). This would allow the sentence (for example) “one who faiths has been righteoused.”

3. The genitive phrase that is usually translated “faith in Christ” may be translated “faith of Christ,” that is, Jesus Christ’s own faithfulness or fidelity. (Presumably this means “his fidelity to God, shown by carrying out his mission on earth.”) This discussion of the

genitive phrase will be a treat for grammarians, made a little more difficult because Greek has a lot more grammar than English does.

Paul could express “faith in Christ” in three ways: (a) by putting a preposition that means “in” or “into” between the words *faith* and *Christ*, as in Gal. 2:16 (where the preposition is *eis*) or 3:26, (where the preposition is *en*); (b) by putting the noun (in this case, “son of God” rather than “Christ”) in the dative case, indicating “to” or “in” (as in Gal. 2:20); (c) by using an objective genitive, “faith in Christ” (as in Gal. 2:16; Rom. 3:22, 26).

The problem is that the genitive case (partially equivalent to our possessive case) can be either “objective” or “subjective.” If it is objective (as assumed in the previous paragraph), the translation is “faith *in* Christ” (meaning commitment or fidelity to him). But if it is subjective, the translation is “faith *of* Christ,” that is, Jesus Christ’s own faithfulness. Nothing in the text indicates either subjective or objective: it is a matter of interpretation.

Luckily we can easily illustrate this issue in English. Albert Schweitzer wrote a famous book with the English title of *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*. In this title, “of” is like the Greek genitive. It may be interpreted as “The Quest *for* the Historical Jesus (in which case it is an objective genitive) or “The Historical Jesus’ own Quest” for something (in which case it is a subjective genitive.) Fortunately, there is no doubt about the meaning of the book title: Schweitzer wrote about the search *for* the historical Jesus.

In Paul’s letters we can immediately find an instance of an objective genitive in Gal. 1:12: “I received [the gospel] . . . through a revelation of Jesus Christ.” “Jesus Christ” is the content of the revelation to Paul, not the possessor of the revelation, and so the genitive is objective.

Over the centuries, most people have understood the genitive construction “faith in/of Christ” in Paul’s letters to mean “faith *in*

Christ,” though occasionally someone has interpreted the genitive to mean “the faithfulness of Christ.”² Recently, however, major scholars have favored “Christ’s faith,” in the sense of “Christ’s faithfulness or fidelity.”³

I do not wish to debate this extensively. No one will deny that Paul thought that people should put their faith in Christ—that is, they should put their trust in him and commit themselves wholeheartedly to him and be faithful to him. Nor would anyone doubt that he thought that Christ’s fidelity to God was of crucial importance in God’s plan to save the world. For the latter, one need merely look at Philippians 2:5–11: Christ was obedient to God to the point of death.

Thus no one wishes to exclude either “faith in Christ” or “Christ’s faithfulness to God” from Paul’s thought. The question is the best definition of the meaning of “faith in/of Christ” in *Galatians*, where the phrase first appears.

I think that there are some passages where “Christ’s fidelity” is the better understanding. In the crucial arguments about circumcision in *Galatians*, however, I am wholeheartedly in favor of the meaning “people should put their faith in Christ.”

I shall cite only two reasons. The first is this: (a) In Gal. 2:16a, Paul states that a person is righteoused on the basis of faith in/of Christ—with no preposition. (b) In the next clause (2:16b) he writes, “we have faithd *in* Christ” with a strong preposition (*eis*, which means “into,” “in,” “toward,” or “unto”). This meaning is unmistakable. (c) In the third clause (2:16c) he writes, “so that we are righteoused on the basis of faith in/of Christ,” again using the ambiguous genitive. (d) At the end of Paul’s stirring statement that

2. Ernest deWitt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (New York: Scribner, 1920), footnote to p. 121.

3. See especially Richard Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1–4:11*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 142–62.

the life he lives, he lives “by faith in the Son of God” (2:20). Here the “in” is expressed by the dative case rather than by a preposition, but the meaning is the same. Faith *in* the Son of God is the only possible construal.

The second and fourth clauses are crystal clear, and they determine the ambiguous ones.⁴ In the span of a few verses (2:16–20), Paul surely did not mean to switch from “Christ’s fidelity” to “our faith in Christ” then back to “Christ’s fidelity” and then again to faith “in Christ.” Any reader ought to see that this is a repetition of the same thought, with a tiny alteration of grammatical structure to add variety or nuance. Paul could not have expected his readers to understand from this slight variation that he was making two different assertions, namely, that we are righteoused by faith in Christ and righteoused by Christ’s own fidelity. We should also note that a preposition meaning “in” appears between “faith” and “Christ” in 3:26. That is clearly the dominant meaning in Galatians: faith in, not faith of.

It is, of course, conceivable that Paul intended to express the two related concepts at the same time. This, I believe, is too subtle. In Galatians, the meaning of “faith in/of Christ” is always “faith in . . .”

Moreover, this is the meaning that the main topic of Galatians requires. The subject of the letter is the circumcision of Paul’s gentile converts. This is a question of membership in or entry into the people of God in the last days—or, as we might phrase it, membership in the body of Christ. Paul’s opponents were arguing that his gentiles were not actually “in.” They had faith in Christ, but they lacked the second membership requirement, circumcision, which would make them truly in the people of God. That is the biblical requirement for membership in God’s chosen people, Israel.

4. See Burton, *Galatians*, 121, strongly supporting the objective genitive: “The context in the present case . . . is decisive for its acceptance here; and the meaning here in turn practically decides the meaning of the phrase throughout this epistle.”

Paul's argument was that his gentiles had fulfilled the one and only requirement to be in the right group. Of course the converts relied on Christ's fidelity, but *his fidelity alone did not transfer some people and not others into membership in his body*. To enter, they had to make a definite commitment of heart, soul, mind, and strength. He called this commitment "faith *in* Christ." This clinches the dominant meaning of "faith in/of Christ." It was what the converts did: they put their faith in him.

It is noteworthy that in the next verse, Gal. 2:17, Paul has one other formulation: "if seeking to be righteoused *in Christ*, we be found . . ." (2:17a). Faith puts people in Christ, as we have also seen in 2:20 ("it is Christ who lives in me, and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith *in* the Son of God.")⁵ Thus it is faith *in* Christ that gives union *with* Christ and that places the believer *in* Christ. We shall see this even more fully when we discuss Gal. 4:26-29.

Galatians 2:16: Translation

The conclusions of these tedious but essential clarifications of issues of translation and grammar are these: (a) I shall use the neologisms "to righteous" and "to be righteoused" for the Greek verb that is cognate with the noun *righteousness*; (b) I shall use "to faith" for the translation of the Greek verb that is cognate with the noun *faith*; (c) I shall translate the genitive phrase *pistis Christou*, which elsewhere might mean "faith *in* or *of* Christ," as "faith *in* Christ" when it appears in Galatians.

The following table of translations compares my translation to that of the NRSV, the NIV, and the JB.

[Y]et we know that a person is (a) not righteoused [justified]

5. In Gal. 2:20, "in" is expressed by the dative case, not by a preposition, but the meaning is the same: "in." It cannot be "of."

by works of law, but rather (b) through faith in Christ Jesus. And we have come (c) to faith *in* Christ Jesus, so that we will be (d) righteous [justified] by faith in Christ and not by works of law, because “by works of law no flesh is righteous [justified].

My translation:

[Y]et we know that a person is (a) **justified not by works of the law** but through (b) **faith in Jesus Christ**. And we have come (c) **to believe in Christ Jesus**, so that we **would be (d) justified by faith in Christ**, and not by doing works of the law, because no one will be **justified by works of the law**.

NRSV:

we know that a man is (a) **not justified by observing the law**, but (b) by **faith in Jesus Christ**. So we too have put our (c) **faith in Jesus Christ** that we **may be (d) justified by faith in Christ** and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be **justified**.

NIV:

we acknowledge that what (a) **makes a man righteous** is not obedience to the Law, but (b) **faith in Jesus Christ**. We had to become (c) **believers in Christ Jesus** no less than you had, and now we hold that (d) **faith in Christ** rather than fidelity to the law is (d) what **justifies** us, and that “no one can be **justified**” by keeping the Law.

JB:

we acknowledge that what (a) **makes a man righteous** is not obedience to the Law, but (b) **faith in Jesus Christ**. We had to become (c) **believers in Christ Jesus** no less than you had, and now we hold that (d) **faith in Christ** rather than fidelity to the law is (d) what **justifies** us, and that “no one can be **justified**” by keeping the Law.

I shall itemize the main agreements and differences among these translations:

1. The words *justified/righteoused* and *faith/belief*: At points (a) and (d) in the translation I have used “*righteoused*” instead of *justified*, adding the latter in square brackets. At point (c) I have translated “*faith in Christ*,” rather than the NRSV’s “believe in Christ.”
2. At (a) and (d) the NIV has “justified”; at point (c) it has “put our faith in Christ Jesus.” At (a) the JB has “what makes a man *righteous*,” but at (d) “faith in Christ rather than fidelity to the

law is what *justifies* us.” At point (c) the JB has “had to become *believers* in Christ Jesus.”

3. The JB and I want to work the verb “righteous” into the verse because that word is present in Greek, while the NRSV and the NIV are content with “justify.” The NIV and I want “faith in” rather than “believe in.” Thus the NIV and the JB partially agree with my desire to use the stronger words, righteousness and faith, rather than the weaker words, justification and belief.

In the translations other than mine, there is some switching back and forth that hides Paul’s argument: the NRSV changes from “faith in Jesus Christ” to “to believe in Christ Jesus”; the JB changes from “righteous” to “justify” and from “faith” to “believers.” Thus Paul’s own terminology is obscured.

We must note the proof text at the end of Gal. 2:16, which is marked as a quotation in my translation and in the JB, but not in the NRSV or the NIV. “No flesh is righteoused” is a quotation from Ps. 143:2 (very slightly different from the LXX), to which Paul adds “by works of law.” He clearly intends this to *prove* what he has said twice in the earlier part of the verse; see (a) and (d) in my translation. He did not intend this to be a bare assertion on his own part. The proof text makes the verse even more repetitious than it would be without Ps. 143:2, but it was doubtless important to him. This exercise in translation and neologism, which clarifies Gal. 2:16, will be much more important when we reach 3:6–9.

We note that in Gal. 2:14–16, the first part of Paul’s rebuke to Peter as he recalled it, perhaps with elaboration, there was nothing at all about individuals earning enough merit points to force God to save them. When Paul writes “not by works of law” (three times in 2:16), only one point of law is at issue: circumcision, the entry rite to Judaism. There is nothing about doing more and more legalistic

works, piling up meritorious deeds, and the like. The question is whether or not Paul's gentile converts must also convert to Judaism by being circumcised.

But, although the topic is a specific "work of law," in this passage Paul's language becomes general—"works of law." In the standard Jewish view, to invalidate one law is to call the whole law into question, and Paul will deal with this in Galatians 3.

I have a final note on Paul's argument and the English language.

The Explanation for the Lack of "To Faith" and "To Righteous" in English

The reason that we have this problem in English is actually the richness of the English vocabulary, which often has accepted from different languages words that are more or less synonymous with other words. In the present case, we can "blame" our problem on the Norman conquest of England in 1066. The conquering Normans spoke French (a Romance language, derived from Latin), and this laid a layer of French vocabulary on top of the basic layer of Old English (Anglo-Saxon), which was a Germanic language. Since the ruling class spoke French, French words were socially superior. Anglo-Saxon peasants tended swine and cows in the fields, but French aristocrats ate *porc* and *boeuf* (beef) at the table. The social superiority of Latin-based words is with us to this day. We would still wince if we saw "swine" on a menu. Often we can use French words (or other Latin-based words) in polite society when the Old English equivalent would be taboo. The words for bodily eliminations and sexual activity come readily to mind. Here we note that, to us, synonyms have distinctly different nuances. "Swine" and "pork" call up different associations. Similarly the synonyms "paternal" (from Latin) and "fatherly" (from German) have different nuances.

Sometimes a word would simply drop out of this dual vocabulary

as common usage settled on one of the synonyms. We retain in modern English the Germanic noun *righteousness* and the adjective *righteous*, but we lost the Old English verb *rihtwisen* (in Middle English, *rightwisen*). The French “to justify” reigned alone. Similarly the French noun that became *faith* lost the cognate verb,⁶ and the Germanic *believe* thrived.

Galatians 2:17-21: Being “Righteoused in Christ” and Sin

These verses are at first reading opaque. How can “seeking to be righteoused in Christ” make anyone a sinner, since this means that Christ would be a “minister of sin”? Clarity comes from Louis Martyn’s fundamental insight that parts of Galatians constitute an argument back and forth between Paul and his opponents, and sometimes he expresses their view in order to refute it.⁷ *They* have charged that Paul and his followers, who wish to be righteoused in Christ, have therefore become sinners because they do not observe the Jewish law, and thus are the equivalent of the “Gentile sinners” of 2:15. This is a straightforward, even obvious conclusion for those who think that Paul was wrong for not requiring his gentile converts to be circumcised. They have not entered the people of God, they do not observe the law, and so they are sinners.

Paul replies that, since he and his gentile converts seek righteousness in *Christ*, then if it is true that they are still in sin, Christ has been made to serve sin. That is an impossible proposition, which means that the entire argument of his opponents has failed. This is indicated by *mē genoito!* in 2:17, translated “certainly not!” (NRSV), “absolutely not!” (NIV), “which would be absurd” (JB), and so on. The

6. I have not studied Old French, and so I am reluctant to propose the actual words. Both verb and noun, however, were based on the Latin *fidō* / *fides*.

7. For the application of the basic insight to Gal. 2:17–21, see J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 247.

expression deserves a stronger translation, such as “not by a damned sight.”

Paul applies the issue to himself: if he followed the admonitions of his opponents and returned to full obedience of the law, then he would be a sinner. He passionately exclaims,

Through the law I died to the law, so that I will live to God.⁸ I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. And the life I live in the flesh I live by faith **in** the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

He adds that he is not the one who nullifies the grace of God. The opponents, of course, saw the grace of God as manifested in large part in the law; Paul does not deny this, but to him the more important aspect of the grace of God is manifested in Christ and his death.

The conclusion to this part of his argument is one of the most telling sentences in Paul's letters. The logic is compelling if one grants (as Paul's opponents do) that God sent Christ: “[I]f righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing” (2:21).

Conceivably the opponents could accept this and still argue that circumcision was also required, but Paul's statement can easily lead to his conclusion that faith in Christ is the sole requirement for people to enter the body of Christ.

8. English translations frequently translate Paul's purpose clauses (*hina*, meaning “so that,” in order that”), which indicate the result of faith, as *might be justified*, and so on. The English word *might*, however, indicates uncertainty. This is a gross error. Paul did not think that if one had faith in Christ it would be conceivable or even probable that he or she would be “justified.” It was a certainty. I have used “will” or “would.” The inaccurate *might* occurs, for example, in the NRSV translations of Gal. 2:16; 3:14; 3:22; 3:24; Rom. 5:21. The NIV has “might” in all of these cases except Gal. 2:16, where it translates “may be,” which is only slightly better. This unfortunate situation arose because in Greek the word *hina* (“in order that”) must be followed by the subjunctive. There is, however, no reason to apply Greek grammar to English. On English usage, see, e.g., William Strunk and E. B. White, *The Elements of Style* (New York: Penguin Books, n.d.), 37. Claire Kehrwald Cook, *Line by Line* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985), 186: “*may* suggests better odds than *might* does.”

Galatians 3:1-5: Arguments Based on the Galatians' Own Experience

Galatians 2:21 seems to be definitive, but, as usual, Paul could think of more arguments. First he appeals to his converts: “You foolish Galatians. Who has bewitched you?” This is not a denunciation of them: he attributes their error to their being misled by sorcerers or magicians. It is noteworthy that as yet he has not said what their error is. He assumes that they know the topic: the circumcision of gentiles. Some outsiders have charmed the Galatians into accepting circumcision—or at least they had argued the case so strongly that the Galatians sought Paul’s advice.

They should not have let their minds stray from the truth, because the crucified Jesus had been “placarded” before their eyes (3:1). Apparently he thinks that understanding Christ’s death should have proved that they do not also require circumcision. Christ’s death (and, of course, faith in him) is totally sufficient.

The next argument (3:2–5) is clearer: “Did you receive the Spirit on the basis of works of law or on the basis of hearing of faith?” “Hearing of faith” is subject to various translations and interpretations, such as “hearing [the proclamation] of faith”; “faithfully hearing [the proclamation]”; “believing what you heard” (NRSV and NIV); or “putting your faith in [“faithing”] what you heard.” As always, the better translation includes the word *faith* rather than *belief*.

Whatever the precise construal of the phrase “hearing of faith,” Paul asserts that by putting their faith in his message the Galatians received the Spirit. That Christians received the Spirit is ubiquitous in Paul’s letters. In this case, the Spirit was accompanied by “miracles” (*dynameis*, “mighty acts”) (3:5). In his view the Galatians could not deny that first they heard and faithed, then they received the Spirit, and only after that did they begin to consider circumcision.

Circumcision (“works of law”) had nothing to do with the spiritual gifts that they had received, which Paul regarded as proof of his effectiveness as an apostle and the genuineness of conversion. (See the discussion above of the agreement between Acts and Paul that receiving the Spirit was the sign of a genuine conversion [pp. 464–65].)

After “receiving the Spirit by faithing what you heard” (3:2), Paul poses another rhetorical question: “Having started with the Spirit are you now ending with the flesh?” (3:3). It is difficult to know the precise meaning of “flesh” here. It is the opposite of the Spirit, of course. It can refer to fleshly pleasure, but circumcision can scarcely be called a fleshly pleasure. Perhaps the point is that the Spirit is life-giving, while the end of flesh is corruption (see Gal. 6:8). Conceivably the flesh in question was the foreskins that the Galatians wanted to eliminate. I think it most likely that “flesh” is a reference to “works of law,” since in the previous verse Paul put “works of law” in opposition to the Spirit that the Galatians received when they put their faith in Paul’s message.⁹ In this case “flesh” in 3:3 is a general term for *whatever* is not “of the Spirit,” because the Spirit comes only from conversion to Christianity. In Galatians 3, of course, the “whatever” is accepting circumcision, a “work of law,” though there is no specific connection between “works of law” and “flesh.” “Flesh” is a natural contrast to “Spirit.” Paul clearly states the opposition of Spirit and flesh in Gal. 5:17–18, where he also connects flesh to the law. He develops the opposition of the two in Gal. 5:19–26 and 6:8, and it is very prominent in Romans.

9. The NIV translates the Greek that I have rendered “are you now ending with the flesh” as “trying to attain your goal by human effort,” which makes “human effort” the opposite of the Spirit and introduces the Protestant dislike of good deeds. Paul, of course, thought that the “fruit of the Spirit” inspired good deeds (Gal. 5:22–26). For “ending with the flesh,” which is a literal translation, the JB has “outward observances,” the NEB “the material,” and the NASB “the flesh.” Here the NIV is a paraphrase that rests entirely on Protestant theology.

Galatians 3:6-9: The Covenant with Abraham

In these verses Paul begins an argument based on the story of God's calling Abraham and making a covenant with him, which involved promises on each side. God promised Abraham land and numerous offspring, and he required that Abraham and his descendants be circumcised (e.g., Gen. 17:9-16). Abraham accepted the offer and had the males of his household circumcised (Gen. 17:23-27). This created a pact or covenant between God and Abraham's descendants. In his argument against circumcision, Paul avoids Gen. 17:9-27 and quotes from Gen. 12:1-3; 15:6; 18:18 (translated below).¹⁰

The argument from Abraham, on its surface, counts against Paul's view and strongly supports the view of Paul's opponents: God commanded Abraham and his descendants to be circumcised. Since the Abraham story is damaging to Paul's position, he cannot have been the one who introduced it into the debate about circumcising his converts. As Martyn showed so clearly, it was Paul's opponents who used the Abraham story in trying to persuade the Galatians to accept circumcision.¹¹

The Mode of Argument of 3:6-9

Paul's task—a severe test of his skill as an interpreter of the Bible—was to use the words of the Abraham story to disprove its most obvious point, which supported his opponents. To an ancient Jew this was a sound exegetical and argumentative technique. One picks words from the sacred text and construes them to his or her advantage.

It is above all in this passage that English translations succeed in hiding Paul's argument, which requires him to take specific words

10. In his quotation, Paul combines elements of Genesis 12 with elements of Genesis 18. A large percentage of his quotations from the Bible (as we saw above, p. 73) conflate two or more verses in the Bible. "Gentiles" is in Genesis 18, not in Genesis 12.

11. Martyn, *Galatians*, 296 and elsewhere.

out of the Abraham story and use them in his own way. By “hiding” I mean changing from the verb *believe* to the noun *faith* and from the verb *justify* to the noun *righteousness* (or the reverse). Because of this switch in English, one does not see that Paul is arguing terminologically: he needs specific words, the words that are in his text of Genesis. Thus in this translation of Gal. 3:6–9 we shall use our verbs *to faith* and *to righteous*, italicizing the noun and verb translated “faith,” and underlining the noun and verb translated “righteous” or “righteoused.”

Just as Abraham “*faithed* God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness” [Gen. 15:6], so, you see, those who *faith* are the sons [descendants] of Abraham.¹² And the scripture, foreseeing that God would righteous the Gentiles by *faith*, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you’ [combining Gen. 12:3 and 18:18]. For this reason, those who *faith* are blessed with Abraham who *faithed*.

The usual translation of these verses is this: “Abraham *believed* God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,’ so those who *believe* are the descendants of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by *faith*, declared the gospel beforehand . . . For this reason those who *believe* are blessed with Abraham who *believed*.”

It is essential to Paul’s argument that the key words in the proof texts—“*faithed* . . . righteousness” (Gal. 3:6, quoting Gen. 15:6) are the same as the words in his own statement of the case in verse 8: “God would righteous the Gentiles by *faith*.” Changing *faithed* to *believed* and righteous to justify (Abraham believed God . . . righteousness; God justifies the gentiles by faith) destroys the argument. In the

12. To show the continuity of the argument from Abraham to Christ, and from being “sons” of Abraham to “sons” of God (3:6–4:7), I have not followed modern translations, which prefer “child” or “children” to “son” or “sons.” See further pp. 540–41.

usual English translation, “believed” is followed by “faith,” and “righteousness” is followed by “justifies.” This disguises the way Paul used his proof text (Gen. 15:6). In his own formulation of what Genesis says, he changed the verb *faith* to the noun *faith* and the noun *righteousness* to the verb *righteouses*. As he wrote it, the verb *faithed* leads to the noun *faith*, and the verb *righteoused* follows from the noun *righteousness*.

The first two verses (6-7) on their own are simple: Abraham was righteous by faith, and therefore others who faith are descendants of Abraham. It follows that, since Paul’s gentile converts have faith, they are descendants of Abraham.

It would, however, be very useful if Paul had a biblical passage that explicitly connects the *gentiles* with *Abraham*. Fortunately, he knew one. Another text in Genesis says, “all the Gentiles will be blessed” in Abraham (Gen. 18:18). He already had “Abraham,” “faith,” and “righteousness” in connection with one another, and now he has “Abraham,” “faith,” “righteousness,” and “Gentiles.” Thus he concludes with words derived from the Bible: “Those who faith are blessed with Abraham who faithed.” The sentence as such is not in the Bible, but the words are.

By quoting from Genesis 12, 15, and 18, not only does Paul construct an argument in favor of considering gentiles who faith to be descendants of Abraham, he also avoids the problem posed by Genesis 17:

God said to Abraham, “As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring [descendants] after you throughout their generations. . . . Every male among you shall be circumcised. . . . Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant. (Gen. 17:9-14)

Thus we see clearly what his opponents’ main argument was: being

a child of God, a member of the covenant with Abraham, required circumcision. By selective use of some of the words in his Scripture (*Abraham, faith, righteousness, gentiles*) and selective omission of others (Gen. 17:9–14), Paul “disproves” the arguments of his opponents.

In the view of many, the verb *reckoned* in Gal. 3:6, quoting Gen. 15:6, is of vital importance: it shows that God does not actually make people who have faith in Christ righteous. They remain sinners, but God chooses to declare them “righteous” forensically (that is, in a legal sense). In Galatians 3, however, Paul merely quotes the passage, using the word *reckoned* because he is quoting. He makes nothing of it. On the contrary, *in his own restatement* of the passage in Gal. 3:8, he says that “God righteouses Gentiles”—not that he merely “reckoned” them to be legally righteous. Galatians 3:8 is his conclusion to this part of his argument. The conclusion lacks the word *reckoned* and insists that God righteouses gentiles.

We see Paul’s facility in quoting Scripture. It is most doubtful that in a crisis situation, while dictating his response to the opponents’ use of the Abraham story, he stopped, went to a library, skimmed through Genesis to find every passage about Abraham, made notes, being careful to take some words from Genesis 12 and some from Genesis 18, pondered the issue for a few days, deciding what to use and what to leave out, and then dictated his response. What makes sense is that “Abraham” brought to his mind the passages about “faith,” righteousness,” and “gentiles,” and that he answered on the spot. Only later, when he wrote Romans, did he add that, oh yes, Abraham was himself circumcised (Rom. 4:9–12).

Galatians 3:10: The Curse of the Law

We have just seen that in order to connect the word *gentiles* to Abraham and thus to righteousness by faith, Paul quoted Gen. 18:18,

“all the Gentiles . . . will be blessed in you [Abraham].” The word *bless* naturally called forth its opposite, “curse,” which he wished to attach to those who followed his opponents. Quite remarkably, he recalled Deut. 27:26, “Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all the things written in the book of the law in order to do them” (3:10). (On the translation of Deut. 27:26, see below.)

I say “quite remarkably” because, to the best of my knowledge, this is the only passage in the LXX that contains “curse” and “law” in the same immediate context.¹³ One would have to turn scrolls for a long, long time to find the passage. Paul’s memory, which worked by keywords, did it for him.

Paul was still arguing terminologically. He wanted “curse” and “law,” not “curse” and “commandment,” and he found what he needed. Thus he could oppose righteousness/faith to curse/law.

Excursus: The Translation of Deuteronomy 27:26 in Galatians 3:10

We must pay attention to the translation of this verse, which both the NRSV and the NIV make too perfectionist in sense, as if to convey that the slightest slip would bring on a curse. I shall comment only on the NRSV, which is the worse case. I shall first give the NRSV’s translation of Deut. 27:26 as it appears in Galatians and then the NRSV’s translation where the verse appears in the Hebrew Bible:

Gal. 3:10: Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law.

Deut. 27:26: Cursed be anyone who does not uphold the words of this law by observing them.

13. In a previous book I wrote that this was the only such passage, and several people have asked how I know. I should now say that I might be slightly wrong. Using Edwin Hatch and Henry Redpath’s wonderful concordance to the LXX, I read all of the passages that contain one of the words for “curse,” and then I crosschecked the chapter and verse with the chapters and verses that contain the word *nomos*, “law.” There are other passages that combine “curse” with “commandment” or some related term, but I found only one that combines “curse” with “law.” I could have missed something; perhaps some computer expert will check up on me.

By using synonyms (“observe and obey”), and putting the two verbs together in Gal. 3:10, the NRSV achieves a perfectionist text: if one does not obey every single commandment in the law, that person is accursed. The two verbs, however, are not synonyms, as the translation of the Hebrew text shows (“uphold” and “by observing”). Moreover, they do not come together. One of them is used in a purpose clause at the end of the sentence. Unfortunately, even the translators of the Hebrew did not reveal that the last clause is a purpose clause.

The sentence in the Hebrew Bible actually reads thus: “Cursed be the person who does not confirm [or “uphold”] the words of this law *in order to* do them.” Here the emphasis is not on perfect fulfillment of every law, but rather on intention. One must “confirm,” “uphold,” “agree with” the law *in order to* do it, that is, with the intention of fulfilling it.

But, of course, Paul was not writing in Hebrew, and it is unlikely that he was mentally translating from Hebrew, and so we need to ask how the sentence runs in the Septuagint. Paul’s quotation as we have it in the Greek New Testament differs from the sentence in the Septuagint only in ways that do not require comment. The first verb (“uphold” or “confirm” in Hebrew) is translated into Greek as *emmenēi*, which may be translated into English as “persevere,” “abide by,” “stand by,” or “be true to.”¹⁴ This catches the spirit of the Hebrew very well. To “stand by,” for example, is very close to “to confirm” or “to uphold.” The Greek also has a purpose clause at the end, as does the Hebrew.

The translation of Paul’s Greek sentence should be this: “Cursed be everyone who does not uphold all of the things written in the Book of the Law with the intention of doing them.”

14. Henry Liddell and Robert Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon: A Supplement* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), s.v. *emmenō*.

The reason for this excursus on the translation of Deut. 27:26 is that Christian students of the New Testament have long carried in their minds caricatures of Judaism in the days of Paul and Jesus. One of the derogatory mischaracterizations has been that Judaism demanded nitpicking perfection of obedience and held that each individual, in order to be saved, must achieve his own salvation by observing every law in the Bible, including especially those that Christians regarded as trivial. The translators who changed Deut. 27:26 from its primary emphasis on intention and commitment to perfection of obedience thought that their view was true, and they were not being intentionally dishonest. I still, however, think that it is quite remarkable to translate the Hebrew word meaning “confirm” or “uphold” or the Greek word meaning “uphold” as “obey.”

Galatians 3:11-12: More Proof Texts

Paul now adds two more proof texts to continue driving a wedge between the law and people who are righteous by faith. First he states that “the one who is righteous by faith will live” (Hab. 2:4), which proves that “no one is righteous before God by the law.” To this he adds, “the one who does them [works of the law] will live by them” (Lev. 18:5), which proves that “the law is not based on faith.” This has the result of putting “law” and “faith” in opposition to each other.

The Mode of Argument of 3:10-12

Once again the argument is terminological. Paul can quote a passage in which “curse” and “law” are connected (Deut. 27:26); one that says precisely what he wants to say, that the righteous by faith live (Hab. 2:4); and one that asserts that the law requires “doing,” which in his view separates it from faith.

Scholars of course have looked for profound theology behind these

proof texts. Paul had profound theological thoughts, but they will not be found in the proof texts. In a rational theology, one would not say that obeying God's commandments proves that faith in God is lacking. Paul himself, in another context, claimed to have been blameless with regard to the law prior to his conversion (Phil. 3:6), but surely he had faith in God before he had faith in Christ. Therefore he must have had faith in God while he was obeying the law perfectly. Moreover, elsewhere he distinguishes the hearers of the law from the doers and states that the doers will be righteoused (Rom. 2:13). A lot of people could join the author of James in saying, "I by my works will show you my faith" (James 2:18). There is no logical reason why the two cannot be combined.

But in Galatians 3 Paul is not laying out a theology that is good for all times and conditions, and he is not distinguishing between laws that should be discarded and those that should be kept. He is, rather, fighting desperately against people who would destroy his entire mission by forcing his gentiles to obey *one* of the "works of law," the requirement of circumcision. In this polemical situation, he wishes to force a complete separation between obeying the laws of the Bible and having faith in Christ. The proof texts in Galatians 3 that put faith and obeying the law in opposition to each other constitute an argument for this one particular circumstance. In this context, obeying the law by being circumcised means not having faith in Christ as the sole necessary condition for membership in the people of God. Accepting some other requirement denies faith by holding it to be inadequate.

Galatians 3:13-14: The Curse of the Law (Continued)

In his proof text in Gal. 3:10, Paul had used the words *cursed* and *law*, and in verse 13 he returns to the curse of the law. "Christ redeemed us

from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’ (Deut. 21:23). The logic here is the ancient belief in the efficacy of substituting one death for another. Ordinarily, an animal substituted for a human, as in the story of the binding of Isaac (Gen. 22). In the sacrificial laws of Leviticus, the sacrifice of an animal atones for human wrongdoing, thus sparing the human divine punishment (e.g., Lev. 6:1–7). In the present case, Christ’s death redeems “us” (apparently Christians). The aim of this sacrificial death was “in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham would come to the Gentiles, [and] so that we will receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” That is, in Paul’s mind, the death of Christ had the explicit goal of enabling his mission to bring gentiles into the people of God, those who inherit the promises of Abraham.

Galatians 3:15-18: Abraham’s Will

Paul offers an analogy between God’s covenant with Abraham and a human will or testament: after the will is ratified, it cannot be changed. Since God chose Abraham before he gave the law to Moses four hundred and thirty years later (by Paul’s calculation), the Mosaic law cannot annul or modify the covenant with Abraham and his descendants (“offspring”).

Then Paul does something really clever: the text of the Abraham story states that God said to Abraham, “This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you” (Gen. 17:10). The word *offspring*, which means “descendants,” is grammatically singular in Greek and Hebrew, as it is in English. We call such words *collective nouns*. In American English, all collective nouns (such as “crowd”) are treated as singular and thus take singular verbs, as in “the crowd is large.”¹⁵ Paul states that since the word

is grammatically singular it refers to only one person, Christ, the Messiah—thus ignoring the fact that “offspring” is a collective noun. Thus the promise can leap over all of those faithful Israelites who over the centuries kept circumcising their sons and settle only on Christ. We see here, once more, how much power and persuasiveness Paul attributed to terminological arguments. It was his form of biblicism: words in the Bible can be employed in various ways.

Paul does not work out the consequences of his argument for Jews: Are they excluded from the promises that God gave to Abraham and his descendants because of the word *offspring*? We shall come to this theological issue in Romans, but here merely mention it. In our present text, Paul’s mind has only one focus: the status of his gentile converts.

These verses (3:15–18) contain another problem: the words that come immediately after Gen. 17:10 (“you and your offspring”) are “every male among you shall be circumcised.” The covenant with Abraham includes not only God’s promises to him and his descendants but also a requirement: the males (plural) must be circumcised. The covenant is an agreement, and Paul detaches one side of the agreement, God’s side, and treats it as “the covenant with Abraham,” ignoring Abraham’s side.

It turns out that Paul’s argument about the Mosaic law being much later than the covenant with Abraham is irrelevant to the issue of circumcision, since that commandment was given to Abraham long before it was given to Moses. (For circumcision in the Mosaic law, see, e.g., Lev. 12:3; Exod. 12:48.) Paul will correct this error in Romans 4, where he discusses the circumcision of Abraham.

15. In British English a collective noun may be treated as a plural, such as “the government have decided,” where “government” is treated as a plural, since the government (the cabinet) consists of several people.

The Mode of Argument of 3:15-18

We have seen what are, to most modern eyes, weaknesses in Paul's arguments. I shall try to evaluate them in ancient terms. On the one hand, his terminological arguments do in general follow the rules of ancient argumentation, including especially ancient Jewish argumentation. Taking a word or half of a sentence out of context and using it to prove a point was not regarded as cheating (as it would be now). If he had offered this series of arguments to a room full of other Jewish experts, they would certainly have caught him on his implied claim that circumcision was not commanded until the Mosaic law. They would have wanted to discuss what happened to the people between Abraham and the Messiah, and it is likely that his interpretation of "offspring" as referring to the Messiah would have been challenged, though it might have had some support. But they would not have said, "Stop using terminological arguments that are based on prooftexting."

Considering the difficulty of his task—using the Abraham story, which strongly supports his opponents, to prove his own point—I would say that he performed it brilliantly. He used words in the Bible to create sentences that are not there, and he combined the new sentences with remarkable agility. He overlooked a couple of flaws, which, however, he corrected in Romans. I think that any group of Jewish experts would have admired his effort.

What non-Christian Jewish scholars of the Bible would not have accepted in Gal. 3:13-14 is that Jesus' death was a sacrifice that saved his followers and had the goal of including gentiles in the people of God. That is, non-Christians would reject his specifically christological views.

Galatians 3:19a: The Purpose of the Law

Paul now asks the crucial question: “Why then the law?” He had already raised the issue implicitly in 2:21: if the law could make people righteous, then Christ died in vain. If the law and faith are in opposing camps, why did God bother to give the law in the first place? The answer is a little surprising: it was given to create transgressions, until Christ (“the offspring”), the recipient of the promises of Abraham, arrived.

The translation “given to create” is not completely certain. The Greek word used as a preposition (*charin*) could mean either “for the sake of transgressions” (that is, to produce them) or “on account of transgressions” (that is, to control them). The following verses support the view that in Paul’s opinion the law was given in order to produce, provoke, or create transgressions.

This may at first sound blasphemous. But let us jump forward to Gal. 3:22: “The Scripture has imprisoned all things under the power of sin, so that what was promised through faith in Jesus Christ would be given to those who faith.” Though I am more inclined to interpret Romans by way of Galatians than to interpret Galatians via Romans, this time, in order to help explain Paul’s surprising view (that by giving the law God intended to create transgressions), we should glance at Romans.

Rom. 4:15: “Where there is no law there is no transgression.”

Rom. 5:13: “Sin is not reckoned where there is no law.”

Rom. 5:20: “Law appeared in order to increase the transgression [referring to Adam], but where sin increased grace abounded all the more, so that, just as sin exercised dominion in death, so grace would also exercise dominion through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Rom. 11:32: “God has imprisoned all people in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.”

In Paul’s view, God had a plan (God’s great plan), which is summarized in Rom. 11:32, quoted immediately above. His conception of the plan doubtless began when he accepted the fact that God sent Christ to save everyone. *Therefore* everything that went before Christ was intended to lead up to him. *Thinking backward* from the sending of Christ, Paul soon came to the giving of the law, which meant that he had to state how the law *led up to Christ*. It did so by making everyone a sinner: all were in need of God’s dramatic action to save the world through the death of his Son.

Thus God’s plan embraces Abraham, the Mosaic law, the coming of Christ and his death, and the final act when he returns to judge and reign. The law plays a negative but essential part in God’s great plan.

One can see that Paul is stating God’s plan by looking at a small Greek word, the preposition *hina*, which means “in order that.” It shows purpose—in this case, God’s purpose. This is a list of relevant passages in Galatians (some of the passages are paraphrased):

- God revealed his son to Paul *in order that* Paul would preach him to the gentiles. (Gal. 1:16)
- We faith in Christ *in order that* we will be righteous by faith in Christ. (Gal. 2:16)¹⁶
- I died to the law *in order that* I could live to God. (2:19)
- Christ became a curse for us *in order that* the blessing of Abraham would come to the gentiles; *in order that* we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. (Gal. 3:13–14)

16. In this list most translations have “so that we *might* be righteous . . .” On “might be,” see n. 8 above.

- Scripture imprisoned all things under sin, *in order that* what was promised through faith in Jesus Christ would be given to those who faith. (3:22)
- The law was our pedagogue until Christ came, *in order that* we might be righteous by faith. (3:24)
- God sent his son *in order to* redeem those under the law, *in order that* we would receive sonship. (4:5)

These are not terminological arguments, established by proof texts in order to defeat his opponents by his superior knowledge of Jewish Scripture. Here, Paul is being a theologian, not a debater. The law is an important part of God's plan, and if it condemns, that is also part of the plan. The condemnation is intended to lead up to Christians receiving sonship in Christ.

What Paul seems not to have thought of is the question that undergraduates have most often asked when we reached this point: "What about all of those people from Adam to Christ? Can they be saved?" Paul mentions the fact that death reigned from Adam to Moses (Rom. 5:14), but he does not say whether or not all of those people who died before Christ came can be raised to eternal life.

Paul was entirely focused on the present and the future and brought in ancient texts and ideas only when he needed them for his immediate purposes. I doubt that Paul was given to *speculative* theology at all. Let us say that he left it to later theologians to speculate on such questions as the fate of Israelites who lived after Moses but before Jesus. On the topic of pre-Christian humanity, one may see Matt. 27:52-53 and 1 Peter 3:18-20, which eventually led to the view that Christ descended into hell in order to save those imprisoned there.¹⁷ The idea of the separation of the soul from the

17. First Peter 3:19 says that Christ preached to the "spirits in prison." Later generations sometimes

body at death, which appears briefly in 2 Corinthians and Philippians (see p. 430), and which was common in Greek thought, allowed people to believe that the souls of the righteous went to heaven and did not have to await the resurrection. And subsequent Christian theology provided salvation for those souls who went to a bad place by having Christ descend to hell.

Galatians 3:19b-22: The Purpose of the Law (Continued)

Immediately above we discussed 3:19a and 3:22, which led to the explanation of Paul's view of God's master plan: God gave the law not to save, but to keep people in bondage until the coming of Christ. Galatians 3:19b, however, appears to be an aside, a remark about the law that does not bear on its role in God's plan. It was "ordained through angels by a mediator. Now a mediator involves more than one party; but God is one."

This parenthetical comment on the law seems to come from nowhere and to lead nowhere. The overall intent is to denigrate the law, to deny that it came directly from God.

It is noteworthy that this denial of the divine origin of the law comes in the midst of Paul's argument that God gave the law to hold people under restraint until Christ arrived. It is a crucial feature of God's great plan. More generally, we may note that most of Paul's arguments reveal his assumption that Hebrew Scripture is true. The sudden denigration of the law in 3:19b does not reflect his full view of the law, and thus I believe it to be merely a remark in the heat of the moment.

Galatians 3:21 emphasizes what we have already seen: the law (being a part of God's plan) is not opposed to God's promises. It was

held that Christ descended into hell. For the history of this belief, see *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 395, 630–31.

not, however, given to “make alive,” since that comes only through faith (cf. 3:12).

Galatians 3:23-29: Bondage under the Law; Freedom through Faith

Verses 23–24 expand on the theme of imprisonment under the law, reiterating that the intent of this bondage was so that “we would be righteous by faith.” Verse 24 also introduces a new title, “pedagogue,” to explain the bondage. (The NRSV translates “pedagogue” as “disciplinarian”; the NIV has “the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ”). The text reads literally “so that the law became our pedagogue until Christ” or “unto Christ.”

In the Greek world, a pedagogue was a man who walked boys to their school to keep them from being molested by their adult admirers.¹⁸ To be sure, the word could have a favorable connotation—a protector or a tutor who leads children in the right path. When we look forward to 4:1, however, we see that Paul thinks of childhood as a life lived under the control of others, which is parallel to being under the law and the opposite of the freedom of the sons of God (4:6). Thus in 3:24 the pedagogue imprisons people “until Christ came, so that we would be righteous by faith.”

Those who have faith have now been freed from the grip of bondage, no longer under a pedagogue (3:25): “You are all sons [children] of God through faith *in* [*en*] Christ Jesus.”¹⁹ I believe that Paul means this *seriously*. Being one with Christ is a real union, and it makes believers part of Christ in a real way. Thus Rom. 8:17: “And if children then heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ”; and Rom. 8:29: “. . . in order that he [Christ] might be the firstborn within a large family.” Putting one’s faith in Christ forms a bond with him

18. See appendix I.

19. On the use of “sons” and “children,” see n. 12 above.

and others who faith; Christ is first among equals. All who are in the Son of God are thereby sons (Paul's word) or children (the preferred translation) of God.

Galatians 3:24-29: The Grand Conclusion

We note that in 3:24 Paul still uses the language of his argument regarding Abraham, "righteousness by faith." Immediately, however, he changes vocabulary: "in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith" (v. 26). After that point the language is that of participation in Christ: "baptized into Christ": "clothed yourselves with Christ"; "all of you are one in Christ Jesus"; "belong to Christ" (3:27-28). Faith leads not just to righteousness, but also to union with the Son of God. This is surely a higher category than "righteousness."

After Paul elaborates on the theme of union and the equality of all within Christ, he gives his clinching final word: "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise" (3:29). This goes back to 3:16: Abraham had only one heir, the singular offspring, Christ. Those who are in Christ therefore inherit the promises. And those who insist on circumcision do not.

These verses are the grand conclusion to Paul's major argument in Galatians—based on Abraham, and comprising God's promises to him, faith, gentiles, the law (including circumcision), and God's great plan—which began in 3:6. The passages between 3:6 and 3:22 are *arguments* in favor of viewing faith in Christ as the sole condition for inclusion in the "in group." One does not find "Paul's total theology of the law" in 3:10-12, which states that it brings a curse and is opposed to faith. Nor does one find it in 3:19-20 (the law was given through a mediator). These are arguments to belittle the law in view of the strength of the opposition. What he thinks *positively* about Christ and salvation appears in the last verses of chapter 3: people

are righteoused by faith, sons of God by faith, and all one person in Christ.

Galatians 3:6–29 is a wonderful argument—my favorite argument in the whole world. It has its little flaws, but it is a remarkable piece of persuasive rhetoric. And, it must be emphasized, *the main points are perfectly clear to the non-expert* despite the intricacy of some of the argumentation, which requires expert knowledge of Paul’s Scripture (or a complete concordance to the Septuagint!). The following points are immediately comprehensible: Abraham put his faith in God and was righteous; those who faith God, namely Christians, even if they are gentiles, are righteous; one should not pay too much attention to the law, which has at best a negative function in the divine economy; faith brings not merely righteousness but also the highest possible standing in God’s sight: being one person with his Son.

Reflections on Arguments and Reasons

There are a few more chapters to go, but at the conclusion of Paul’s “long argument,” which runs from Gal. 2:14 to 3:29, it seems appropriate to do some summing up. The section begins with the repeated assertion that people are righteoused by faith and not by works of law (Gal. 2:15–16). “Not by works of law” is repeated one more time in 2:21: “[I]f righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.” The grand **conclusion** (3:24–29) is that God intended the law to lead negatively to righteousness by faith; all Christians are sons of God through faith; all are one person in Christ Jesus; he was the only “offspring” of Abraham; therefore Christians are heirs of Abraham.

It seems to me self-evident that the answer to the question, “*why* did Paul oppose the law?” is this: in Paul’s view, God intends to save people in another way: faith in Christ, being one person with Christ.

The law does not produce this result, therefore the law should not be imposed on gentile converts.

Along the way there are arguments that oppose accepting the law. “Those who rely on the works of the law are under a curse” (with scriptural proof texts): 3:10–12; the law was ordained by a mediator; the law does not cancel the covenant with Abraham, who was righteous by faith; the law is enslaving; and so on. But these are all **arguments**. Paul did not begin his ministry by analyzing the effect of the law but rather the revelation that proved that God sent Christ to save the world. If the savior was Christ, it was not the law. Or, as he says explicitly, “if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing” (Gal. 2:21). God would not have sent Jesus to die on the cross if some other means of saving the world had been at hand.

This is Paul’s **reason** for opposing the imposition of the Jewish law on gentiles. God never intended to save them by the law, he always intended to save the world through Christ. Paul tries to bolster his position by accusing the law of bringing a curse, of being given by a mediator, and so on, but what is truly *wrong* with it is that it does not lead to being one person with Christ. I’ve boldfaced the terms *conclusion*, *arguments*, and *reason* to call attention to the way Paul thinks. His **conclusion** expresses his conviction, his **reason** for opposing circumcision of his converts, but his **arguments** are simply tactics to persuade his readers of his conclusion.

“If a law had been given that could make alive, then righteousness would come through the law” (Gal. 3:21). This joins Gal. 2:21 (just above) as a direct statement of Paul’s **reason** for arguing against the law.

The Argument against the Circumcision Party in Light of Paul's Biography

It is worthwhile here to recall Paul's own history. He was once a persecutor of Jewish Christians. What did he have against them? Probably one of his grievances was that they were admitting uncircumcised gentiles into the Christian movement and telling those gentiles that they thereby became true worshippers of the one God, the God of Israel. That is, in his early days he probably took the same view that his opponents in Galatia were now putting forward.

When God revealed Christ to Paul, Paul was persuaded to reverse his position: he would now spend his life trying to get gentiles into the people of God in the last days without, however, requiring circumcision and the other "works of law" that separated Jew from gentile in the Diaspora. The direct revelation of Christ gave him the certainty that his past position was wrong and that his present practice was right. He must prove that those who took his former view were entirely wrong and were opposing God's plan.

Galatians, Part 4: Further Arguments and Concluding Remarks

Galatians 4:1-11: Enslavement to “Elemental Spirits”

These verses repeat the main point of 3:22-24: without faith in Christ people are in an evil plight. The terminology, however, changes. In chapter 3, it was the scriptural law that “*imprisoned* all things under the power of sin” (3:22); according to chapter 4, “the elementary spirits of the world” *enslaved* us. The Greek word translated “elementary spirits” by the NRSV is *stoicheia*. The NIV has “basic principles”; the JB “elemental principles.” The NEB has “elemental spirits” but helpfully adds in a footnote (“*or the elements of the natural world, or elementary ideas belonging to this world.*”) It is impossible to know precisely what Paul had in mind, but there is a large bibliography for the inquiring mind.¹

1. Of the commentaries, I recommend J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (London and Cambridge: MacMillan and Co., 1865, 10th ed., 1890), 167; and H. D. Betz, *Galatians*,

For our purposes, however, it is sufficient to know in general what Paul meant by *stoicheia*: they are the controlling powers in pagan religion and philosophy. These could have been controlling *thoughts*, but more likely include supernatural beings such as the gods that govern the stars. We do not know what stage the Hellenization of Galatia had reached, but we may assume that the Galatians had been pagans of some sort.

Thus, the scriptural law imprisons, paganism enslaves. Functionally, the two are equated. There is only one state of freedom: becoming one person in Christ. In 4:5, Paul mentions bondage to the law again and expresses the state of freedom as “sonship”: he tells the Galatians that God sent Christ to redeem those under the law, “so that we might receive sonship” (4:5). We recall that in 3:26 Paul told the Galatians that, since they are in Christ, they are sons of God. The proof of their status, as it often is, is that God has sent his Spirit into the hearts of believers (4:6). Verse 4:7 repeats their status: “no longer a slave but a son; if a son also an heir through God.”

Before moving on to the next verses, I should say something about “sons” and “sonship” in this passage (Gal. 4:5). The topic recurs in Romans 8 (see immediately below). In chapter 18 (p. 520 n. 12), I briefly explained the reason for using Paul’s “son” rather than “child.” Paul, following the contemporary practice and biblical precedent, used “sons” where we would now prefer “descendants” or “children.” In this section of Galatians, however, “son,” “sons,” and “sonship” constitute a theme that runs from 3:7 to 4:7, serving to link one statement to another, and these references are also linked to Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Therefore I shall use “son” where Paul uses it, occasionally reminding the reader that by “son” he meant anyone, male or female—except, of course, when referring to Christ himself.

Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 204–205, who gives copious references to secondary literature.

The same applies to “sonship,” which appears in Gal. 4:5 and Rom. 8:15, 23; 9:4. The translation of the Greek word for “sonship” as “adoption as children” (NRSV) in the four passages just listed weakens Paul’s terminology, which does not distinguish the sonship of Christians from the sonship of Christ. Translators understandably want to include women, and they strongly desire to protect the uniqueness of Christ as Son and as having sonship, but this obscures Paul’s radical view of the significance of becoming one with Christ Jesus. In other contexts, Paul would doubtless want to make sharp distinctions between the Son of God and the numerous “sons of God” of Gal. 3:26; Rom. 8:14; Rom. 8:19 (visible only in the Greek text). But in the passages now under discussion, in which those in Christ have equal status with Christ, Paul does not make a distinction.

In Gal. 4:8, Paul returns to the bondage imposed by paganism: “You were enslaved to beings that by nature are not gods.” He wonders how, after they came to be known by God, they can return to the control of the “weak and beggarly elemental spirits” (*stoicheia* again). He proves their return to bondage by saying that that “are observing special days, and months, and seasons, and years.”

Since Paul has already equated the effect of his gentile converts’ submission to the Jewish law with that of being under the “elemental spirits,” we cannot be absolutely sure to what he thinks the Galatians are “returning”: possibly their pagan practices, but more likely another set of prescribed observances—those of Judaism. Observation of special days, new moons, and seasonal changes, however, was hardly unique to Judaism. I do not know of any religions in Paul’s larger world that did not have special observances during the year. Both the Mesopotamians and the Egyptians had worked long and hard on the study of the sun, moon, and stars in order to understand their changes and the periodic changes on the ground. The star Sirius, for example, completes an annual cycle in almost precisely

365 days. When it first became visible in the eastern sky each year (its “heliacal rising”), the Egyptians knew that it was time for the annual flood of the Nile. And so on, *ad infinitum*. In an agricultural society, the seasons and the heavenly signals of changes were vitally important, and religious observances tended to be keyed to a specific time on the calendar.

Thus all we know from this passage with certainty is that it is set in the ancient world and that Paul did not want his converts to mark special days and periods with sacrifices, parades, dances, song, poetry, feasting, and the like, whether these were the practices of their pagan neighbors or of Judaism.

Although it is conceivable that he has in mind their returning to pagan practices, the simplest explanation of what Paul means by *stoicheia* is this: Having learned about circumcision, the Galatians went on to other aspects of Judaism, in which one of the most important laws was the keeping of the Sabbath—a special day. Next in importance in the Diaspora would have come food laws. It is noteworthy that both food laws and the Sabbath are discussed in Romans. While noting Paul’s argumentative equation here of adopting the Jewish law in whole or in part with the *stoicheia* of some form of paganism, we must recall that this is not his usual view of the law, nor is it a part of a supposed systematic theology of the law. (Cf. p. 537 above, on Gal. 3:10–12). It is an argument against those who want to add more Jewish practices to circumcision.

Paul does not respond by discussing the relative importance or significance of different commandments in the Torah; he simply seeks to dissuade his converts from adopting these further practices by using a concept he expects they will recognize. In the same way they have abandoned the ritual practices of their pagan pasts, he does not want them now to “return” to another set of ritual practices.

Galatians 4:12-20: A Personal Plea

Now Paul changes his tactics and appeals to the Galatians, reminding them of their care and concern for him when he stopped there because of a physical infirmity.

[T]hough my condition put you to the test, you did not scorn or despise me, but welcomed me as an angel [or messenger] of God, as Christ Jesus. What has become of the goodwill that you felt? For I testify that, had it been possible, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth? (4:14-16)

We do not know from this that his problem was with his eyes. For many people, the sense of sight is the most precious of the senses, and “eyes” may simply be a reference to one of the most valuable parts of a body.

In the midst of his plea, Paul briefly criticizes his opponents: “They make much of you, but for no good purpose; they want to exclude you, so that you may make much of them” (4:17). This note is sounded again in 6:12: “It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that try to compel you to be circumcised.” Apparently Paul’s opponents were “courting” the Galatians, paying a lot of favorable attention to them, in order to get them to remove their foreskins. “Flesh” here may have a double meaning: the opponents would score points if the foreskin is removed, but the removal of that bit of skin would be a victory for “the Flesh,” a word that Paul sometimes uses to indicate the power that opposes “the Spirit” (see below, 5:16; Rom. 8:3-8 and elsewhere).

From what would the opponents exclude the Galatians (4:17)? Paul does not specify, but presumably he means that the opponents would consider them as being outside their version of true Christianity, which required both faith in Christ and observance of the Jewish law. Whatever the exclusion, the result would be that the Galatians

would be totally reliant on the teaching of Paul's opponents. Thus the Galatians would have to "make much of" their new mentors (4:17).

In verse 19 Paul resumes his plea: "My little children, for whom again I am in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you. I wish I were present with you now and could change my tone, for I am perplexed about you." The verb in the phrase "is formed in you" is *morphōthēi*, based on *morphē*, "form" or "shape." English derives a lot of words from *morph-*, such as endomorph, and very recently has used "to morph" to mean "to transform." The Greek verb "transform" is *metamorph-*, which Paul uses in Rom. 12:2 (where he urges the Romans to be transformed mentally) and 2 Cor. 3:18, where he writes, "all of us are being transformed into the same image" (that is, the "image" or form of Christ; the NIV correctly has "into his likeness"). In 1 Cor. 15:49–52, the change of Christians into the likeness of Christ happens all at once, at the resurrection. We recall that in 2 Cor. 3:18, the transformation is already underway. The Greek word translated "are being transformed" is *metamorphoumetha*, based on *morphē*.

In Gal. 4:19, the phrase "until Christ is *morphed* in you" indicates that they have not begun to be transformed into the likeness of Christ, but that it is still possible. The tone of intimate affection in this verse—Paul has given birth to them once and hopes to do so again—is very striking after the heat of chapter 1 and the accusation of being bewitched in 3:1–2. Paul probably did feel like a parent whose children have betrayed him. In any case, he pulls out all of the rhetorical stops.

Galatians 4:21–5:1: An Allegorical Argument

Paul wished not to leave out anything that might turn the situation in Galatia around, and his brain had come up with another argument,

this one also based on the Abraham story, which his opponents had made central. This time he writes an *allegory* (4:24). I have not included in this book a discussion of literary forms and various modes of interpretation (for which I hope the reader is grateful), but now I have to give a partial introduction to a large field.

In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul used a well-known form of interpretation called “typology”; he uses the word *type* in 10:6 (above, pp. 319–21). In typology there is what we would now call a “prototype” or an “archetype,” which comes early in a text. Some later event is interpreted in the light of the prototype. Thus the Israelites were “baptized into Moses,” and later the Christians were baptized into Christ. The Israelites ate spiritual food and drank spiritual gifts; later, the Christians partook of the Eucharist; and so on. Then comes the point: when the ancient Israelites returned to idolatry, God killed many of them. This implies the warning: you Christians had better not return to idolatry. Thus the ancient prototype proves something about the present.

Typology appears elsewhere in Paul. Abraham, for example, serves as a prototype. He was righteous by faith; therefore you can be righteous by faith. I think that Paul handled typologies very well. But he shows himself not to be very gifted in the creation of allegories, and there are other forms of figurative speech at which he does not shine—though, as always, the point that he wants to make is clear enough.²

An allegory is a two-level story. Something that happens on the higher or older level proves something about the lower or younger level. A professional definition is this: “[A] description or narrative—in verse, prose or drama—presenting literal characters and

2. For example, the olive tree in Rom. 11:17–24, where some of the things he says about olive trees are botanically incorrect.

events which contain sustained reference to a simultaneous structure of other ideas or events.”³

Paul’s allegory is based on the story of Abraham, Hagar, Sarah, and the birth of Isaac in Gen. 16:1–16 and 17:15–22. These are the “literal characters” on whom the allegory is founded. The allegory selects a few items from these passages. The opening, “Abraham had two sons” indicates the selectivity: Gen. 25:1–2 lists another six sons, but the allegory is about two sons, Ishmael and Isaac, and their mothers, Hagar and Sarah. The main points of the biblical story are these: After many years of marriage to Abraham, Sarah had not produced a son, and so at her behest Abraham impregnated Sarah’s servant girl, Hagar. Hagar, the successful producer of the desired son, looked down on Sarah, who punished her. Hagar ran away and eventually gave birth to Ishmael. Sometime later, God appeared to Abraham and promised him that Sarah, though well past her childbearing years, would nevertheless have a son. Abraham laughed, thinking this to be impossible, and when the son was born he was named Isaac, which is derived from the Hebrew word for “laugh.”

Now for the allegory:

Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and the other by a free woman. One, the child of the slave [Ishmael, son of Hagar], was born according to the flesh [i.e., in the natural course of events]; the other, the child of the free woman [Isaac, son of Sarah], was born through the promise. Now this is an allegory: these women are two covenants. One woman, in fact, is Hagar, from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the other woman corresponds to the Jerusalem above; she is free, and she is our mother.

Here we should note that the only information about Hagar that

3. *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*³, ed. Dominic Head (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 19.

appears in the Bible is that she was Egyptian (Gen. 16:1, 3). No one has discovered why Paul connects her with Mount Sinai. It may be no more than a simple assertion: she is Sinai.

It is also a little problematic for there to be a third level of the allegory: Hagar is not only Mount Sinai (where Moses received the law), but she is *also* Jerusalem, home of the “false brothers,” who want to circumcise Paul’s gentile converts. This is not an elegant allegory, but what Paul writes is clear: a slave woman represents Mount Sinai and Jerusalem.

The allegory continues: “But the other woman corresponds to the Jerusalem above; she is free, and she is our mother.” Paul now draws the moral: “You, my brothers, are children of the promise, like Isaac. But just as at that time the child who was born according to the flesh persecuted the child who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also” (4:28–29). “[T]he child of the slave will not share the inheritance with the child of the free woman. . . . [W]e are the children, not of the slave but of the free woman. For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (4:29–5:1).

The theme of bondage versus freedom is the same as in Paul’s previous arguments (Gal. 3:23–25; 4:1–10) and needs little explanation. It is, however, one of the two principal issues in the allegory, and we shall return to it below.

The second principal issue in the allegory is the statement about persecution: Ishmael persecuted Isaac, and now his descendants, the representatives of Mount Sinai and the present Jerusalem, are persecuting “us,” the descendants of Sarah and Isaac (4:29). There is no biblical passage in which Ishmael *persecutes* Isaac. In Gen. 21:9, Ishmael is said to have been playing with Isaac. Sarah objected, and Hagar and her son were cast out. This is hardly a case of Ishmael persecuting Isaac. There are, however, a few later Jewish traditions in

which Ishmael is hostile to Isaac.⁴ These are all later than Paul, but it would seem that he knew of some story of hostility between the half-brothers.

It is not clear precisely what Paul has in mind in saying that the descendants of Hagar are persecuting the descendants of Isaac in his own time. Paul probably interprets the policy of his opponents in Galatia, who were insisting on circumcision, as thereby “persecuting” them, or perhaps him. Paul also may have had in mind the times he had been punished with the thirty-nine lashes in synagogues (2 Cor. 11:24; cf. v. 26). He may have been thinking of the Jewish persecutors of the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem (1 Thess. 2:14). Or all of the above. Near the end of the chapter we shall see very intriguing references to persecution.

We return to the first principal issue of Gal. 4:21–5:1, the statements that the biblical law is an enslaving force. The allegory ends thus: “So then, brothers and sisters, we are children, not of the slave but of the free woman. For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (4:31–5:1).

Galatians is often called “The Charter of Christian Liberty,” which freed Christians from the bondage of the law—just as Paul said. But we need to reflect a little bit about law and bondage. The Jewish law is not bondage to someone who wishes to live by it. The American colonists found aspects of British law to be oppressive, and they wished to be free of them, but then they passed their own set of laws.

Laws that coerce people into doing things that they do not want to do—such as paying taxes—often feel like oppression, no matter how good and necessary they are. Almost any legal system is better than anarchy, and living in a society without the constraint of law

4. For references, see J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 444.

would be terrible. The Jewish law is not very strict, as religious laws go. Puritan law, which for a time governed Britain and one of the American colonies, was much more severe. Thus Paul's outburst concerning freedom from the law should not make us think that the Jewish law was horribly oppressive. It was not, and it still is not.

So why did Paul treat it as he did? It was the attempted *coercion* of his gentile converts to accept the law, especially the requirement of circumcision, when he had told them that they should remain as they were, uncircumcised gentiles, and that as such they were in the people of God in the last days. Without coercion or compulsion (Gal. 2:3, 14; 6:11) there would not have been much of an issue. If a gentile convert himself decided that he wanted circumcision, Paul would not have objected (see 6:15).

When in 5:3 he points out that "every man who lets himself be circumcised . . . is obliged to obey the entire law," the threat is real. If a gentile suddenly decided to convert to Judaism, he or she would have to have a period of training, especially because of the laws of *kashrut*—the Jewish food laws. One would have to learn new shopping and cooking practices. Adjusting to Sabbath rules would be difficult. And so forth. Changing from one regimen to another is hard work and might be felt to be oppressive.

Thus, in his view, the situation in Galatia could be interpreted as oppression: his converts were being *coerced*, and if they yielded they would find that the sudden imposition of the Jewish law felt like bondage.

Galatians 5:2-5: Possible Exclusion from the Body of Christ

Besides the threat that circumcision would lead one to have to observe the entire Jewish law (repeated in 5:3), Paul has a harsher threat: accepting circumcision means that "Christ will be on no

benefit to you” (5:2). “You who want to be righteous by the law have cut yourselves off from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit, by faith, we eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness” (5:4–5).

This is the clearest indication in Paul’s letters that it is possible for a Christian to be excluded from the body of Christ. As we saw in chapter thirteen, in the vice lists (one of which follows in Gal. 5), Paul is “very liberal with homiletical damnation,”⁵ and each and every sin is said to exclude the sinner from the kingdom of God. But when he deals with a specific case of incest, he states that after the man is punished his spirit will be saved (1 Cor. 5:1–5), indicating that even a serious transgression does not keep the man from being saved.

There are other passages that threaten divine punishment, but apart from the vice lists these are usually not threats that the offender will be condemned forever and be destroyed at the judgment. As we have noted in several places, Paul seems to have held the view, which was standard in Judaism, that punishment atones, and that if God punishes someone with death, death atones. “If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire” (1 Cor. 3:15). In the next chapter (1 Cor. 4:1–5), Paul mentions the possibility that at the final judgment God might even find some fault in him. Presumably then God would punish him appropriately, which would save him. The threat of punishment is not a threat of exclusion.

This topic—what it takes to sever a convert from union with Christ—can be discussed at much greater length,⁶ but here I shall say only that I would not take this remark (you have cut yourself off from Christ, which is a threat of losing salvation) as Paul’s final

5. E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 109. On the vice lists’ damnation of all sinners, see above, pp. 337–39.

6. *Ibid.*, 105–14.

view on the topic. He makes the threat in the heat of the moment. What if a Christian in Galatia who had already accepted circumcision came to Paul and said that his letter had persuaded him, that he had made a mistake, and that he trusted only in Christ and regarded his circumcision as unessential? Would Paul still have said, “you are cut off”? Possibly he would have applied to himself his cautionary remark, “do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes . . .” (1 Cor. 4:5).

Galatians 5:6: Circumcision as a Matter of Indifference – Paul’s Original View

We considered Gal. 5:2-6; 5:12; and 6:12-25 above, in order to see everything that Paul wrote about circumcision in Galatia in one place (pp. 492-99). There we also discussed at length the connection between circumcision and persecution. The present section is intended to put the issue of circumcision in the context of his argument of Galatians. There will be some overlaps or repetitions, but in view of the enormous importance of this issue in Paul’s career and in the early history of Christianity (whether or not gentile Christians should also convert to Judaism), I think that some repetition may be useful.

Galatians 5:6, coming where it does, is one of the most interesting verses in Paul’s letters. “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is worth anything, but faith working through love.” One must now ask, “then why say that one who accepts circumcision is ‘cut off’?” (5:2-4). The answer, of course, which I proposed earlier, is *context* (pp. 492-99). It seems that in 5:6 Paul suddenly broadens the issue and refers not to what the Galatians are up to at that very minute, but to a larger situation. Paul, Peter, James, and all the other leaders of the Christian movement were circumcised. The gentile

converts were not circumcised. Yet in Christ this distinction did not matter at all. All were one person with Christ through faith in him.

As we saw above, the context in Galatia was that of compulsion to circumcision on the grounds that in order to be in the group that would be saved, gentile Christians should not only have faith in Christ but should join Jewish Christians in being circumcised sons of Abraham. Compulsion, together with the implied claim that faith in Christ was not sufficient, and that Paul had misled his converts, led him to think that “*must* be circumcised” had to be countered by “*must not be* circumcised.”

If we assume that Paul’s original view was that circumcision was a matter of indifference, and was therefore merely an option, we can understand that he thought it to be totally wrong to insist that it was necessary. This explains Galatians. It could not be the other way around: that first, Paul thought that circumcision should be prohibited, and only later conceded that it was optional. Thus Gal. 5:6 gives us his original view, prior to the Galatian controversy.

It is noteworthy that “love” is suddenly added to faith (“faith working through love,” 5:6)—suddenly, that is, to the reader of Galatians, since it had not appeared previously. I think that in this verse Paul is backing away from the controversy and falling back on his more general principles. Circumcision is indifferent; love is essential. Love also appears in verses 13 and 22.

Galatians 5:7-12: Circumcision and Persecution

Paul will continue with his more general principles in verse 13; first, however, he has another thought about his problem with the Galatians: “Who prevented you from obeying the truth?” (5:7). “The one who is confusing you will pay the penalty, whoever he may be”

(5:10). “As for these agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!” (5:12 NIV).

In 5:10, the troublemaker is singular; in 5:12, the subject is plural. As was the case with the opponents in Corinth, Paul does not name names. (Apollos is named, but he may not have been one of the super-apostles.) We do not know whether or not Paul knew who the troublemakers were. “The one” in 5:10 seems to hint that he does know the ringleader, but then the next sentence refers to his opponents in the plural, which leaves us totally in the dark.

Galatians 5:11 is one of the more surprising sentences in Galatians: “If I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted?” It appears that the opponents in Galatia had told the Galatians that Paul preached circumcision. It is highly probable that before his conversion he *had* preached circumcision—that is, when he was a persecutor he thought that gentile converts should not be regarded as heirs of Abraham unless they were circumcised. But to make that charge against Paul *now*, late in his career, was to dredge up his first career, which he had probably told the Galatians about. Possibly, therefore, the opponents had produced more recent evidence that Paul still preached circumcision. Perhaps his opponents had told the Galatians the story that is now in Acts 16:3, that Paul had Timothy circumcised. Or maybe they claimed victory in the case of Titus (Gal. 2:3–5). In any case, we see here that favoring circumcision of gentiles avoids persecution, and he accused his opponents of preaching circumcision in order to avoid it. That he does not preach circumcision is proved by the fact that he is persecuted (cf. above on Gal. 4:29). This issue is discussed at greater length in chapter 17, pp. 492–95.

**Galatians 5:13-14: An Epitome of the Law:
“Love Your Neighbor as Yourself”**

Paul returns to general principles and admonitions. In 5:1, he writes, “For freedom Christ has set us free,” but now, resuming his pastoral role, he points out that those who are free from the Jewish law—as his converts are—nevertheless must act in accord with at least some passages in the law. They should not use their freedom in selfish ways. “Through love become slaves to one another” (5:13). Under this heading, he recommends this epitome of the Jewish law: “the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”

It was common in Judaism to seek, behind the numerous laws, summaries—or, better, epitomes of the law: simple statements of the essence or heart of the law that are easy to remember.⁷ Paul follows in this tradition. There are numerous short statements in the Pauline letters concerning correct behavior, many of which are explicitly in favor of keeping the law and following Jewish practices. I shall quote a few of these, which complement Gal. 5:14:

1. 1 Cor. 7:19: “neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything, but keeping the commandments of God.” Here “the commandments of God” refer to the scriptural law, while excluding the requirement of circumcision—just as is the case in Galatians 5:14.
2. 8:4: “so that the righteous requirement (*dikaiōma*) of the law might be fulfilled in us.” Here Paul does not specify what the “righteous requirement” is, but since it is singular, he may have had in mind “love your neighbor.”
3. 13:8-9: “Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for

7. A selection of these, plus comments on their general import, appears in Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief* (London: SCM, 1992), 257–60.

the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.” This is very much like Gal. 5:14, but this time Paul adds some particulars (13:9): Christians should observe the laws against adultery, murder, stealing and coveting—“and any other commandment,” all of which are summed up by “Love your neighbor as yourself.”⁸

Thus we see that Gal. 5:14—Christians should love one another, thereby fulfilling the love commandment (Lev. 19:18), which epitomizes the entire law—is quite at home in Paul’s letters as a whole. This reinforces the view that at this point he is pulling back from the Galatian controversy and stating his more general positions.

The favorable statement about fulfilling the law is nevertheless somewhat surprising in Galatians, where it follows an attack on the sanctity of the law (3:19); a depiction of it as having only a negative role in terms of God’s great plan (3:19, 22); a description of it as enslaving (4:9; 5:1); a complete contrast between the law and grace (5:4); and the use of the requirement to obey the law as a threat (5:3).

To prevent this sequence (and similar passages) from appearing to be self-contradictory, many scholars have proposed that throughout Galatians, and in fact throughout his letters, he has in mind two different “uses” of the law or two different attitudes toward it. The distinction between the two is a Protestant one (though Catholic scholars may now use it): (1) A *legalistic* use of the law—that is, an exercise in achieving merit by numerous acts of obedience, which, if numerous enough, will force God to save the self-achiever. (2) “Law” in the sense of a divine law “conceived of as an ethical principle,” the requirements of which are “essential” to Christianity.⁹

8. For further references and discussion, see Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, 94–105.

9. The quotation is from Ernest deWitt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (New York: Scribner, 1920), 294.

This is eisegesis, pure and simple—reading something into a text that is not there but that one wishes to be there: the opposite of exegesis, deriving meaning from a text. It is not reasonable to assume that Paul had in his mind the theology of Luther 1,500 years later, that he kept this distinction in mind throughout his letters, and that he never said a word about the wrong “use” of the law.

The Protestant idea of Jewish legalism is 100 percent wrong to start with, and the argument goes downhill from there. There is nothing in Paul about using the law “legalistically” or compiling merits. He never accuses anyone of that. This is merely a Protestant invention, and Paul’s original readers would never have been able to see a distinction between different “uses” of the law. Thus the Protestant position has to be that Paul *really* had it in his mind, though the readers could not see it and could not have had the same distinction in their minds.

The issue is what is *essential* to being a member of the body of Christ, and Paul answers, “faith in him alone, and *one does not need to be Jewish* to have faith”—rather than, “and people *must not compile merits*.”

Instead of thinking of Paul as secretly switching from one definition of the law to another, we should see that he says this or that about the law depending on circumstances. It is a question of context. There are different answers to different questions, as we shall now see.

The Different Questions that Paul Addresses in Galatians in Connection with the Jewish Law

Question 1. How to enter the body of Christ? Answer: “By faith in him, not by being Jewish and observing the Jewish law.”

Question 2. If there is no law, are there guidelines to behavior?

Answer: “Yes, indeed, and here are some from the Jewish law. These are all fine and good, because we are talking about behavior rather than getting into the body of Christ.”

Thus Paul *did* carry in his mind two issues that concern the law: (1) “getting into the body of Christ” and (2) “behavior when you are in.” We do not have to read these into his letters, but simply need to read what he says on each topic. In Galatians 5, he puts them in close proximity to each other; there is no feeling of contradiction because the subject matter, the point at issue, clearly changes. In Galatians, he marks the change of topic in 5:13: “you were called to freedom from the law [topic 1], *only* do not use your freedom selfishly, *but rather* through love serve one another [topic 2].”

Luther himself saw this much better than do the scholars who follow him. If it is a matter of being righteoused, the law is excluded. If it is a matter of ethics, it shows the way.¹⁰

Galatians 5:16-26: Spirit vs. Flesh

We have noted numerous times that Paul consistently thought that Christians receive the Spirit. He now writes, “Live by the Spirit ... and do not gratify the desire of the flesh” (5:16). He continues by contrasting the Spirit and the Flesh, which have opposing desires. He concludes by saying, “if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law” (5:18). This is basically a repetition of 5:13a (free from the law). Galatians 5:18 is followed by lists of “the works of the flesh” and “the fruit of the Spirit” (5:19-23), which is followed by an equivalent to 5:13b, the correct way to live: “let us be guided by the Spirit, not competing with or envious of one another” (5:26). That is, 5:16-26 can be seen as an expansion of 5:13.

We have already seen the contrast of spiritual and “fleshly” people

10. See above, pp. 456-57.

in 1 Cor. 3:1–4, and the opposition of Spirit and flesh will recur in Romans, where we shall see that the “flesh” can almost become a *power* that is against God. Here, however, it seems to mean simply “normal humanity,” which is often marked by selfishness and unkindness.

The list of “works of the flesh” in 5:19–21 is a vice list, which we have discussed in an earlier chapter.¹¹ As we have seen, all of these vice lists refer to the sins of gentiles as seen by Jewish critics, and they emphasize idolatry and sexual immorality. This one begins with three words for sexual immorality, followed immediately by idolatry. As in the other vice lists, Gal. 5:19–21 includes sins that seem not to be mortal failures, such as drunkenness and carousing. Nevertheless, as in other vice lists, the text says that every transgressor of any item in the list will forfeit the possibility of salvation.

I am unable to resist quoting Robert Browning on this list. The poem is “Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister,” one of Browning’s “Dramatic Monologues,”¹² the study of which prepared me for Galatians, since a drama and a dialogue must be reconstructed from a monologue. In the story of the Spanish Cloister, one monk hates another. The hater is the speaker: “If hate killed men, Brother Lawrence, / God’s blood, would not mine kill you!” The speaker considers how he can cause the innocent Brother Lawrence to sin in such a way as to guarantee his eternal damnation. His first thought is of Galatians 5:

There’s a great text in Galatians,
Once you trip on it, entails
Twenty-nine distinct damnations,
One sure if another fails.

11. See above, pp. 337–41.

12. Robert Browning, *The Poems and Plays of Robert Browning* (New York: Modern Library, 1934), 13–15.

I have never been able to find twenty-nine sins in Gal. 5:19–21. The simplest count yields fifteen. In any case, the monk, like many other readers, took Paul at his word when he said, “Those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” (5:21). This result of the smallest transgression seems to be a necessary part of the vice list. Outside of the list, Paul thought otherwise, as he states in 6:1: “If anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness.”

Paul, not being a Palestinian Pharisee, did not think through a system of forgiveness and atonement for his converts. He expected them to live by the Spirit and to be more or less as near to perfection as he was. We do find, however, from time to time, bits of what could become a system of restoration after transgression. In addition to Gal. 6:1, we should note especially a text to which we have often referred, 2 Cor. 2:5–11, where Paul discusses a specific case of transgression and restoration, which includes punishment by the community and forgiveness by the community and by Paul.¹³

We also know from 1 Cor. 4:4–5 and 2 Cor. 5:10, however, that some sins would wait until the Judgment when Christ would hand out rewards and punishments in accordance with “what has been done in the body, whether good or evil” (2 Cor. 5:10). It would have been helpful to later Christianity if Paul had offered firmer guidelines for dealing with transgression within the Christian community.

Following his list of sins that are the result of the desire of the flesh, Paul offers a shorter list of good actions, which are the “fruit of the Spirit”: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (5:22–23). “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Gal. 5:24).

13. In 2 Corinthians 2, the word translated “forgive” is *charizomai*, “bestow as a favor,” as in Rom. 8:32. The usual term for “forgive” is *aphiēmi*, which in Paul’s letters appears only in Rom. 4:7, which is a quotation from Ps. 32:1.

His view was that becoming a Christian (having the Spirit) made one upright and virtuous, so that good deeds were the natural result. This is another indication that he thought that becoming Christian really changed his converts.

Galatians 6:2-10: Closing Admonitions to Do Good Deeds

Paul continues his ethical admonitions, which I shall not print in full. People should bear one another's burdens and thus "fulfill the law of Christ" (2:2). I doubt that here Paul has in mind Jesus' own ethical statements; the "law of Christ" is probably the very same as the law that all Christians must follow: "love your neighbor as yourself."

Because of the Protestant horror at the thought that there are rewards for *deeds*, I shall quote Gal. 6:7-10:

Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit. So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.

Thus it is not true that Paul was opposed to doing good deeds in the hope of reward. Since God is just, he rewards good deeds and punishes evil (Rom. 2:6-11; 2 Cor. 5:10; Gal. 6:7-10). Reward is not salvation, nor is punishment damnation. We must remember that Paul, who was certainly righteous by faith and one person with Jesus Christ, and who was destined for salvation, nevertheless thought that at the judgment God might find some flaw that merited punishment (1 Cor. 4:4). Salvation depends on being in the right group: in Judaism, being in the covenant; in Paul's Christianity, being joined with Christ. Deeds, whether good or evil, take place within the group

that will be saved, and people are punished or rewarded in relative terms. The big question is whether or not one is in the right group.

We have seen that the erroneous view that Paul was opposed to good deeds and reward is the result of identifying those “works of law” that he opposed (especially circumcision of gentiles) with *good deeds*. Actually, “works of law” (becoming and being Jewish) are in a separate category from “good deeds.” Good deeds were not works of law, and works of law were not good deeds. “Works of law” are bad if they separate Jew from gentile. In Paul’s view a *good* law would be conformable to the rule that in the people of God in the last days there would be “neither Jew nor Greek” (Gal. 3:28).¹⁴

Good deeds were crucially important, and Paul was insistent that his converts must do good for other people and should follow the commandments to do good and to love other people. With the exception of idolatry and sexual activity, the vice lists are about actions that hurt other people, and the virtue list, governed by the biblical commandment to love one another, is entirely about how to act toward others. Ethically, Paul was a humanist—as was Jesus (e.g., Matt. 25:31–46).

I shall make this vital point in still another way: Paul wrote a lot about righteousness by faith (esp. in Galatians and Romans); he wrote about “works of law” (also esp. in Galatians and Romans); he wrote about good deeds and bad deeds—human behavior—in every letter, but these deeds constitute a topic that does not relate to “works of law.” These are separate topics. The phrase “works of law” goes with its contrary, “righteousness by faith.” The opposite of good deeds, which are the fruit of the Spirit, is evil deeds, the result of living according to the flesh.

For admonitions to perform good deeds, see, for example, the

14. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, 159.

vice lists in Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, and Galatians; the virtue lists (2 Cor. 6:6; Gal. 5:22-23; Phil. 4:8); the numerous exhortations to love other people (1 Thess. 4:9-10; Gal. 5:14; Rom. 13:8; 1 Cor. 13, where the exhortation is implied). A list of passages on “good works” is given below (pp. 571-72).

In Galatians, “righteousness by faith” is opposed to “works of law”—the normal requirements of being Jewish—but never to the virtues and good deeds that he constantly urged on his converts. He clearly states his objection to “works of law” and his dedication to “righteousness by faith,” but righteousness by faith is never in conflict with doing good deeds. Thus in Galatians he goes from righteousness by faith (chaps. 2-3), to the love commandment (which implies good deeds, 5:14), to the “fruit of the Spirit” (5:22-23), which are good deeds, and these all stand together with no difficulty.

To summarize: “works of the law” do not qualify as good deeds or charitable actions for other people. When he uses that term, Paul had in mind principally circumcision—no one’s idea of a charitable deed. It is likely that the Sabbath is the main instance of observance of “days, months, seasons, and years” (Gal. 4:10 and Rom. 14:5-6). Thus we can add Sabbath observance as a “work of law.” In Rom. 14:2-3 he refers to food laws. As I have noted more than once, these are the three laws that most obviously separate Jew from gentile in the Diaspora.¹⁵ None of these three requirements of the Jewish law—which are “works of law”—constitutes the law that all should observe: to do good to other people.

Galatians 6:11-18: Closing Benediction; More on Paul’s Opponents and on Persecutions

To make the letter more personal and to guarantee its authenticity,

15. On the three laws that Christians should not keep (circumcision, days, and food), see further *ibid.*, 100-102.

Paul writes the final lines in his own hand (Gal. 6:11). He makes a similar remark in 1 Cor. 16:21. He was not trained to be a scribe, and so his writing was not the neat, small writing of a scribe. Probably it was sprawling, the strokes not perfectly smooth, and the letters too large.

He now returns once more to the dispute with the Galatians. It obsesses him. “It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that try to compel you to be circumcised—only that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.” We recall that Paul used the verb “to compel” at all the crisis points in the long-running debate about the circumcision of gentile converts: Gal. 2:3 (Jerusalem); 2:14 (Antioch); 6:12 (Galatia). The reference to his opponents not obeying the law (6:13) may refer back to his accusation of Peter (2:14). We do not know in what ways his opponents in Galatia were not obeying the law.

The accusation that his opponents are trying to coerce the Galatians to be circumcised “only that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ” reveals a complexity (above, pp. 492–95). Behind the persecutors of Paul and the would-be circumcisers of the Galatians, there is another layer of persecution. Paul is being persecuted (5:11), presumably by opponents like the false brothers in Jerusalem, who have the same views as the troublers of the Galatians. So let us say that there are these groups:

- a. The “liberal Jewish Christians” who want to win gentiles but do not wish to circumcise them (Paul and his colleagues and supporters). These people are being persecuted.
- b. The “right-wing Jewish Christians” (such as the “false brethren” in Jerusalem) who want to force gentile Christians to be circumcised.
- c. But now we learn that there are potential persecutors of group

(b), who want to coerce *them* into coercing Paul's gentile converts. Probably the actual persecutors of Paul are the potential persecutors of Paul's opponents in Galatia. Thus Paul can accuse the people in group (b) of coercing gentiles to be circumcised so that they themselves will not be persecuted.

The most likely identity of people in group (c) is that they are non-Christian Jews who do not want uncircumcised gentiles to claim the right to be considered descendants of Abraham, who threaten to persecute the "conservative Jewish Christians" (b) in order to get them to act on their own convictions. These non-Christian Jews also persecute Paul, presumably by flogging him if he comes to a synagogue.

This is all speculative. I do not see any way to say decisively who the potential persecutors of Paul's opponents were. It would help if we knew where which persecution was taking place—in Jerusalem, Syria, or Asia Minor. But we do not know. And, since Paul will not name names, we must retire from the field, defeated, but knowing that there were various conflicts over the great issue of bringing gentiles into a Jewish group.

We noted above (p. 543) that when Paul accuses the opponents of wanting to circumcise the Galatians in order to "boast in [their] flesh" (6:13), "flesh" may be a double entendre, referring not only to human nature, which is opposed to the Spirit (5:17), but also to the foreskins of the Galatian males.

Paul, of course, will boast only in the cross of Christ (6:14a). Recalling his earlier self-description in 2:19–20 ("I have been crucified with Christ"), he now says of the cross, "by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

He now offers his final word on circumcision: "neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything, but a new creation [is

what matters].” This is a repetition of his standard, basic view of circumcision that we saw in 1 Cor. 7:19 and Gal. 5:6. *But* if someone says that circumcision is essential, this implies that the death of Christ and faith in him are not adequate, and in that case “Christ died in vain” (2:21).

The meaning of 6:16, “As for those who follow this rule—peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God” is highly debatable. Are there two different groups—those who follow the rule that circumcision does not matter *and* the Israel of God? Or is the “and” “exegetical,” which would lead to the translation, “those who follow this rule, that is, the Israel of God”? Further, is Paul stating here that the Christians have supplanted the Jews and that the Christians are the Israel of God?

Elsewhere I have discussed the aspects of Paul’s letters that might lead to either one of two different conceptions of the Christian church that figure in later Christian literature: (a) the Christians supplant the Jews and are *the true Israel*; (b) the Christians are a “third race,” neither Jewish nor pagan.¹⁶ Here I shall briefly indicate my conclusion: Paul did not think that far ahead. He was trying to get *everyone* to have faith in Christ before the final judgment. How his group would relate to paganism and Judaism socially in the future did not cross his mind, partly because he thought that the Lord was about to come and could not think about future social groups. One can find some support for each view (true Israel; third race) in his letters, but there is no support for the view that he intended to define Christianity socially for all the centuries to come.

This particular verse (Gal. 6:16) would favor the definition of Christians as “the true Israel.” In favor of “the third race,” note Paul’s

16. E. P. Sanders, “Paul’s Jewishness,” in *Paul’s Jewish Matrix*, ed. Thomas G. Casey and Justin Taylor (Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2011), 51–73.

admonition to “give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the Church of God” (1 Cor. 10:32).

Paul’s conclusion to the letter sounds a little tired and also lacks the warmth of his other conclusions. “From now on, let no one make trouble for me; for I carry the marks of Jesus branded on my body” (6:17). As we have noted more than once, it is likely that the trouble in Galatia overlapped with the trouble in Corinth, and that Paul *was* tired, perhaps almost exhausted, by the disputes.¹⁷ The marks on his body (Greek, *stigmata*) are surely the marks left on him by being flogged in synagogues (five times) and beaten with rods by Roman magistrates (three times), as noted in 2 Cor. 11:23–25.

Beginning with St. Francis of Assisi in the late twelfth to early thirteenth century, very devout Christians began to have the wounds of Jesus on their bodies. These wounds appeared where the story of Jesus’ crucifixion indicated: the back (from flogging), the hands and feet (from the nails that held him to the cross), and the head (from the crown of thorns).¹⁸ There is no reason, however, to think that Paul was referring to such phenomena when he mentioned the “wounds of Jesus” on his body. The signs of his suffering from being flogged and beaten meant that he *shared the sufferings* of Christ, not that his wounds were precisely like those of Jesus.

With regard to the warmth of Paul’s conclusion, we note that in Galatians he has only a concluding blessing: “May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit” (6:18). The endings of 1 Thessalonians, 1 Corinthians, and Philippians all have some addition:

- 1 Thess. 5:25–28: “Beloved, pray for us. Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. . . . The grace . . . be with you.”

17. See above, p. 417 n. 6.

18. See “Stigmatization,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 1311.

- 1 Cor. 16:21-24: “Grace . . . be with you,” as in Galatians, but also “My love be with all of you in Christ Jesus.”
- Phil. 4:21-23: “Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of the emperor’s household. The grace . . . be with your spirit.”

Because of editing, we cannot be sure of the original ending to 2 Corinthians, but in addition to “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ” we now read “and the communion of the Holy Spirit.”

Concluding Remarks on Paul’s Two Major Formulations of How Gentiles Enter the “In Group”

As we noted, Galatians is the first letter in which the formulation “righteousness by faith” appears in Paul’s correspondence. This in fact seems to be its starting point: the opponents introduced God’s commandment to Abraham that he and his descendants be circumcised, and Paul had to prove that the Abraham story actually shows that righteousness is only by faith and does not require becoming Jewish. Fortunately, the words *faith*, *righteousness*, and *gentiles* all occur in passages about Abraham, and Paul uses them to counter the arguments of his opponents. As we shall see, righteousness by faith also has a major role in Romans.

The other principal soteriological formulation is “participation in Christ.” Here the language varies somewhat: “being crucified with Christ”; “Christ lives in me”; “being baptized into Christ”; being “one person with Christ”; and the like. In both of these (being righteoused; being one person with Christ), *faith in Christ* is the entry to the new status. It is also through faith that Christians receive the promise of the Spirit (3:14).

These three results of faith in Christ must be approximately the

same, though the wording is quite different. The results of faith are not sequential (e.g., being righteous, then receiving the Spirit, then in Christ becoming the children of God). These are all terms for *becoming Christian*.

If we look at Gal. 3:24–26, we note that people escape the pedagogue by being righteous by faith, and immediately afterward, that they are children of God through faith. People go from a bad state (not Christian) to a good state (Christian) through faith, and for this good state Paul has two main terms: being righteous and being one person with Christ. To this we add one further gift that proves that the converts have entered the people of God in the last days: they have the Holy Spirit and produce the fruits of the Spirit in their lives.

Earlier we noted that an advantage of our translation of the passive form of the verb “to righteous” (“to be righteoused,” *dikaiousthai*) was that its meaning is not entirely clear. The obvious translation of the verb would be “to be made upright,” and Protestants, knowing that in fact Christians are not entirely upright, understood it as “through faith, declared to be upright even though not really upright.” In the active voice, then, “God righteouses the Gentiles by faith” (3:8) means, in the Protestant view, “God declares Gentiles to be righteous by faith even if they are not righteous.”

Although “upright” *ought* to be a perfectly good translation of the *dikai-* (right-) root, it is not best translated that way in Paul. Paul had the *right-* terminology thrust upon him because of the Abraham story. The terminology usually refers to a *status*: being upright or being declared innocent by a court. In Paul’s hands, “being righteoused by faith” becomes a synonym for a *change or transformation*: moving from one status to another, that is, “becoming one person with Christ.”

In Paul's letters, therefore, "to righteous"/"to be righteous" is a term that describes the *transfer* from a bad state to the good state, from the group that would be destroyed at the judgment to the group that will be saved. It is parallel to "dying with Christ," signifying the change. Note the parallels between these two verses:

- "We were under a pedagogue until Christ came, so that we might be *righteoused* by faith." (3:24)
- "But now that faith has come . . . in Christ Jesus you are all *children of God* through faith." (3:26)

Finally, with regard to Paul's use of terms, we note that "righteous" (= "just") is *the* standard word in Judaism for being a good person in human-to-human relationships. If one is *pious* it means that the person obeys the commandments that govern relations between God and humans (such as not worshipping graven images); one who is "righteous" obeys the commandments that govern relations between human and human (such as not stealing or coveting).¹⁹ In Jewish sources, the Mosaic law has "two tables." The first table is piety, the second justice (or righteousness). For example, according to Josephus, John the Baptist exhorted the Jews "to practise justice towards their fellows and piety towards God"²⁰ (see also above, pp. 313–14).

Paul does not follow this practice, though it is ubiquitous in Greek-speaking Judaism. Paul uses both terms in the standard way once: "how devoutly [or "piously"], justly, and blamelessly we behaved to you believers" (1 Thess. 2:10).²¹

19. The principal Greek words for "pious" or "piety" (toward God) are *hosios* and related terms (*hosiotēs*, for example) and *eusebeia* and related terms. The most frequent words for "just," "righteousness," "uprightness," and the like (toward other humans) are derived from the *dikai-*root.

20. In discussing correct behavior toward humans, Jewish sources also use *koinōnia* (fellowship) and *philanthrōpia* (love of humanity). For references see *Sanders, Practice and Belief*, 193–94, 257, 260.

21. NRSV: "how pure, upright and blameless . . ."; NIV: "how holy, righteous, and blameless . . ." The

The only other really clear case of Paul's using the *dikai-* (right) root as a standard ethical admonition or description is Phil. 4:8: "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is *just* [or *right*], whatever is pure . . . think on these things." A few other verses deserve note: "it is *right* [or *just*] for me to think this way . . ." (Phil. 1:7); "He who supplies seed to the sower . . . will supply . . . your seed . . . and increase the harvest of your *righteousness*" (2 Cor. 9:10).

The only point of all this is that Paul knew and occasionally used the *dikai-/right-* root in the way common in Greek-speaking Judaism: it describes ethically correct behavior toward other people, and righteous behavior (plus repentance and atonement) kept one solidly in the covenant. In Galatians and Romans, however, it does not mean that. It becomes a much more comprehensive word than "justice toward other humans." It is one of the key words for becoming Christian. Paul evaluated people ethically, of course, but he was far more interested in larger categories: those who would be saved and those who would be destroyed at the judgment. "Being righteoused" makes one a member of the group that will be saved.

Despite this deep concern to convert people to Christianity, he paid a good deal of attention to the conduct of his converts (how members of the "in group" should behave). One sees his concern for the right behavior toward other people in the vice lists (as we have seen) and also especially in the conclusions of most of his letters:

- "See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all." (1 Thess. 5:15)
- "Let all that you do be done in love." (1 Cor. 16:14)

first word in the sequence is *hosiōs*, an adverb related to *hosios*, one of the two main words for "piety." Thus here Paul uses "piety" and "right-" together, as is common in Judaism.

- Taking one example from Gal. 5:16—6:10: “Let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.” (6:10)
- Phil. 4:8, quoted just above (“whatever is true . . .”).

Finally, to show Paul’s view of “good works” or “good deeds,” I give a list of many of the appearances of the word *work* (*ergon*, plural *erga*) in Paul’s letters, noting how it fared in the hands of translators.

“Good Works”

1. “[God] will repay to each according to his works” (Rom. 2:6). Instead of “works” the NRSV has “deeds”; the NIV is “what he has done.”
2. “To those who patiently do good work . . . eternal life” (Rom. 2:7). The NRSV, the NIV, the JB, and the NEB all delete the word *work*. Some translations substitute “doing” for “work.”
3. Some gentiles have “the work of the law” written on their hearts (Rom. 2:15). This is a good thing. For “work of the law” the NRSV has “what the law requires”; the NIV is “the requirements of the law.”
4. “If anyone’s work remains”—which implies that it is good—“he will receive a reward” (1 Cor. 3:14). The NRSV has “if what has been built on the foundation survives . . .” The NIV is similar; neither includes the word *work*.
5. “Are you not my work in the Lord?” (1 Cor. 9:1). Presumably Paul thought that this work of his was good.
6. “Always give yourself fully to the work of the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58).
7. “For he [Timothy] is doing the work of the Lord, just as I am” (1 Cor. 16:10).

8. “. . . so that you may share abundantly in every good work” (2 Cor. 9:8).
9. “Their end will match their works” (2 Cor. 11:15, referring to the false apostles). The NRSV has “deeds” for “work”; the NIV has “actions.”
10. “All must test their own work, then, and then his boast will be in his own [work] alone, and not in that of another person” (Gal. 6:4). The translations here vary quite a bit; the NIV changes “work” to “actions.”
11. “I am confident that the one who began a good work in you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6). Presumably the inaugurator of the good work is God.
12. “If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful work for me” (Phil. 1:22). The NRSV and the NIV change “work” to “labor.”
13. “Because of the work of the Lord he [Epaphroditus] came close to death” (Phil. 2:30).
14. “. . . remembering before our God and Father your work of faith” (1 Thess. 1:3).

The major English translations show an aversion to using the word *work* in a positive context, though in Paul’s letters “work” is usually a positive good—though, of course, there are also evil works. The translators, I suppose, wanted to avoid the horror of doing *good works*, which must necessarily lead to “works righteousness” and compiling merits. The translations “good labor,” “good deeds,” and “good actions” avoid saying that *works* are good.

In four of the passages above, Paul states that people are appropriately rewarded or punished according to their works (nos. 1, 2, 4, and 9). This is painful to the eyes and ears of many Pauline scholars. Perhaps most painful, a “work of law” (no. 3) is good, and one may even boast in his own works (no. 10).

The Protestant difficulty with these passages in Paul, of course, is that in Galatians and Romans “works of law” are bad. How can they be good?

Easily. To reiterate: The topic changes, or as I put it above, “different questions, different answers.” If one asks, how one can enter the body of Christ, Paul will answer, “by faith alone, not by observing the Jewish law and becoming Jewish.”

If one asks what he thinks of requiring his gentile converts to observe the works of law, he will respond, “Let him be accursed! And castrated!” (Gal. 1:8-9; 5:12).

If one asks how Christians, who have the Spirit and who share the body of Christ, should behave, he will say that they should observe Lev. 19:18, which is “the whole law.” They should do good to other people; they should be kind, faithful, patient, and so on; they should do the work of the Lord.

And, finally, if we were to ask if God notes good and bad work at the judgment, and settles the accounts, Paul would say yes. In accord with common Jewish thought, he doubtless did not think of a place of eternal torment called “hell,” but he did think that people would be rewarded and punished appropriately. The punishments and rewards according to behavior are meted out at the judgment (1 Cor. 3:12-15; 4:4-5). I do not know what a postmortem punishment or reward would be like, but Paul probably just left that to God.

In Paul’s thought and in Galatians as a letter, there are no contradictions about what he says about the law, good works, the work of law, and so on. If, of course, one says that this is not a letter, but rather a long list of dogmas, each of which is true no matter what the context, then one will find conflicts among the various dogmas. Dogmatically, putting side-by-side the view that Christians must be free from the law (Gal. 5:1) and his admonition that his converts

should obey it (5:14) might be a problem, but in the letter this does not cause a problem, because the subject matter has changed.

But why in the world should anyone turn a wonderful, powerful, moving letter into a list of dogmas?

Philippians

Introductory Issues

The City of Philippi

Acts gives this information concerning Paul's leaving Asia Minor to begin his ministry in Europe:

We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days. (Acts 16:11-12)

Philippi gained its name when Philip II of Macedonia (382-336 BCE), the father of Alexander the Great, took the city from the Thracians in order to obtain the rich gold mines in the territory. The city became famous in 42 BCE, when the forces of Mark Antony and Octavian defeated those of Marcus Junius Brutus and Cassius Longinus nearby. This was the war that culminated the revenge for the assassination of Julius Caesar, in which Cassius and Brutus had played major parts.

After their victory, the two leaders divided the empire, Antony taking the east and Octavian (who became Augustus) taking the west.

The two victors needed to reduce their enormous armies, and to aid in this they enlarged Philippi and refounded it as a Roman colony, which was partly settled by grants of land to veterans. About twelve years later Octavian enlarged Philippi again and settled more veterans there.

Philippi was on an old royal road that was a major artery for east-west traffic. In the second century BCE, Rome rebuilt the road as the *Via Egnatia*. Thus Philippi was a substantial city that occupied an important place in the empire.¹

Unity of the Letter

Reading the letter, one quickly notes the oddity of “finally,” in 3:1, followed by the apparently final exhortation, “rejoice in the Lord.” But this “finally” comes about halfway through the letter as we now have it. Another “finally” appears in 4:8, again followed by seemingly final exhortations, concluded by “Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you,” which sounds like a concluding benediction.

Once again, however, the letter as we have it does not end, but rather returns to an earlier theme (2:25–30), the Philippians’ concern for Paul in his difficult circumstances (4:10–19). The third and final conclusion is 4:21–23.

One then notes the mysterious placement of a tirade against “those who mutilate the flesh,” which begins in 3:2 and segues into a meditation on righteousness through faith in Christ, which leads to sharing his sufferings and becoming like him in his death (3:3–11). What is curious is that the warning against circumcisers comes out of

1. *CAH* 10: 26; *OCD* 3, 1162.

the blue and is general in its nature, there being no sign that the issue of Galatians was actually troubling the Philippians.

That this tirade comes after “finally” and “rejoice” requires an explanation. Even scholars who would never dream of rearranging the letter had to offer some account of the abrupt change from “finally” in 3:1 to the warning about circumcisers in 3:2. Thus J. B. Lightfoot:

Here, however [after 3:1], he seems to have been interrupted. Circumstances occur, which recall him from these joyful associations to the conflict which awaits him without and which is the great trial and sorrow of his life.²

Another important curiosity is what appears to be a hymn found in 2:6–11 (see pp. 602–05 below). Did Paul write it? Did Paul adapt an earlier hymn? Among the early Christians was there a convert who knew hymns (or poems) praising heroic figures and who wrote one on behalf of Christ? What about the Philippian congregation led Paul to include this hymn where it is?

The final curiosity that I shall mention is this: “I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion [more literally, “loyal yoke-fellow”], help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life” (4:2–3). Was there serious disharmony in the church, opposing factions each headed by a woman? Was the “loyal yoke-fellow” Epaphroditus (who delivered the letter) or someone else whose name was obvious to the recipients?

Another way of putting the difficulty of our letter is this: Philippians as we have it does not consist of a prolonged and coherent letter about one main theme, leading to a clear and rounded

2. J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians* (London: Macmillan, 1868), 68.

conclusion, as is the case in Galatians; nor is there an explicit series of topics such as one finds in 1 Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians. As Lightfoot said,

Of plan and arrangement there is even less than in St Paul's letters generally. The origin and motive of the epistle are hardly consistent with any systematic treatment. . . . Even the threefold division into the explanatory, doctrinal, and hortatory portions, which may generally be discerned in his epistles, is obliterated here.³

This does not mean that the letter is a pointless hodgepodge. Even if it is a bit of a hodgepodge it is not pointless. Far from it: Philippians has major themes that are distinctive—Paul's imprisonment; the assistance he received from Philippi; the role of their messenger Epaphroditus—as well as a replay of standard themes that recur in several letters, such as the return of the Lord and the need for moral perfection. Most important for the understanding of Paul's theology is the reflection in 3:3–16 that follows the attack on the circumcision party.

Not surprisingly, several theories have arisen to explain these "oddities" in the letter. There are theories of later interpolations by another hand (e.g., to explain the passage on the circumcisers and the reference to Euodia and Syntyche). There are also theories that our letter is a combination of diverse letters, written at different times and for different reasons—such as a letter of thanks for support; a letter sent when Epaphroditus returned to Philippi; a letter against circumcision.⁴

I do not know that an interruption, which caused Paul to change topics so suddenly (Lightfoot), is intrinsically more or less likely

3. Ibid., 67.

4. I shall not review these numerous proposals. For a detailed summary, see John T. Fitzgerald, "Philippians, Epistle to the," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:318–28, with an extensive bibliography; more briefly, F. W. Beare, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians* (New York: Harper, 1959), 1–5.

than the theory of different letters that were combined into one by an editor, as proposed by many recent scholars. It must have been the case that Paul was sometimes interrupted while dictating, and the interruption may have been substantial. But we also know that editorial activity was necessary in order to publish Paul's letters. The collector could not have found them all perfectly preserved in the state in which Paul wrote them.

Moreover, it is highly probable that Paul wrote more than one letter to each of his churches—not just Corinth—and if they were brief, an editor would have been justified (as he saw it) in combining them. We observed before that the editor could not have attached the same importance that we do to chronological sequence, and in any case the letters were probably not dated. Thus a compilation of remaining parts or fragments of letters is a reasonable solution. Something has created the puzzle of why Paul shifts gears so dramatically between 3:1 and 3:2, and this question is accompanied by other, less obvious puzzles.

I do not have firm opinions about the various suggestions that have been made to solve the problems. But so that the reader will have an idea of what a theory of partition and rearrangement looks like, I shall give the moderate and simple proposal of F. C. Beare: the letter contains three elements. The first is a letter of thanks for the material aid brought by Epaphroditus (4:10-20). Secondly, Paul sent a letter to Philippi with Epaphroditus when he returned (1:1—3:1; 4:2-9; 4:21-23). The third element is “a long interpolation in the second letter,” which contains the warning against the circumcision party (3:2—4:1).

I am not opposed to proposals such as these. My problem is that there are several proposals that, to my eye, have some merits, and I cannot settle on any one of them. Since I doubt that it will ever be possible to answer decisively the questions about the composition of

the letter, I shall deal with the letter thematically, commenting on each of the major topics. There may be portions of different letters within the document as we have it and there may be one or two later interpolations, but everything in the letter we have was written by Paul and directed to Philippi, and each passage discusses an important topic.

The Occasion of the Letter

If the letter as we have it was written on one occasion, we can say what it was: Paul was in prison (Phil. 1:7, 12-14). An emissary of the Philippian church, Epaphroditus, had come to him bearing aid from the congregation. Epaphroditus had become seriously ill. The Philippians learned of his illness and expressed their concern. He was now healed, and Paul sent him back to Philippi bearing a letter of thanks that included other material, including admonitions.

If one sorts the text into different letters, the events become more complicated, but these basic facts about imprisonment, assistance, Epaphroditus, and illness remain.

Where was Paul When He Wrote to the Philippians?

There are two more important introductory issues in the study of Philippians: Where was Paul imprisoned? Where does Philippians fit in the sequence of the surviving correspondence? I shall deal first of all with the *place*.

When Acts was considered infallible in all respects, being not only an accurate account of Paul's missionary endeavors but also a narrative of his career that omitted nothing, there were only two possibilities: if he was in prison, either he was in Caesarea after his arrest in Jerusalem (Acts 24-26), or he was in Rome, where he was sent from Caesarea (Acts 28:26-31). There are, however, lacunae

in Acts, as we saw especially in discussing Paul’s trips to and from Corinth and the founding of the churches in Galatia.

When we look at what Paul wrote about his hardships and his punishments, we find other large gaps in Acts. In 2 Cor. 11:23–29, Paul gives a list of his woes. I shall indicate beside each item what Acts says about it.

<u>2 Corinthians</u>	<u>Acts</u>
“Far more imprisonments.”	Prior to Paul’s final trip to Jerusalem, Acts has one imprisonment that lasted half the night (Acts 16:19–40).
“Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.”	Acts records zero instances of lashing.
“Three times I have been beaten with rods” (summary punishment by a Roman magistrate)	One time is mentioned in 16:22.
“Once I received a stoning.”	Acts 14:19 describes a stoning.
“Three times was I shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea.”	Acts does not mention shipwreck prior to Paul’s journey from Caesarea to Rome.
“Hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked.”	This is not mentioned in Acts.

As Kirsopp Lake observed, in Acts we are “dealing with selected episodes, not with a continuous history.”⁵

Acts gives so little information under the heading of “Paul’s hardships” that it is tempting to look for a motive. Possibly the author simply did not feel drawn to Paul’s desire to boast of weakness. I shall offer a partial explanation for omitting so many of Paul’s woes below (pp. 590–91).

Once it was granted that Acts contains sizable gaps, and this insight was coupled with the fact that Paul wrote of many imprisonments

5. Kirsopp Lake, “The Chronology of Acts,” in *The Acts of the Apostles*, ed. F. J. Foakes-Jackson et al. (London: Macmillan, 1932), 5:474.

before the two described in Acts, scholars went in search of appropriate times and places for him to have been imprisoned. They soon came up with a major possibility: Ephesus. There is quite good evidence that, despite the silence of Acts, Paul was at some time in prison in Ephesus.⁶

First, we return to the fact that in his list of sufferings in 2 Corinthians 11, he states that, compared to the other apostles, he had had “far more imprisonments, with countless floggings, and often near death” (11:23). When he wrote this, he had not been in prison in either Caesarea or Rome. We may suspect a little exaggeration, since after saying “countless floggings,” he enumerates his beatings (11:24–25). But we must believe that he had in fact been in prison at least twice when he wrote 2 Corinthians.

Why put one of these imprisonments in Ephesus? In 1 Cor. 15:32 Paul wrote, “if with merely human hopes I fought with wild animals at Ephesus, what would I have gained by it?” (that is, had he not believed in the resurrection). In 2 Cor. 1:8–10, he refers to the affliction that he suffered in Asia (the Roman province of which Ephesus was the capital), which was so severe that he feared for his life.

We cannot be certain of the precise nature of his difficulties. It is a little hard to believe that he literally faced a lion (let us say) in an amphitheater and lived to tell the tale, though this is not totally impossible. It is better to accept a figurative meaning: he was in serious danger of some sort of other, and the “wild beasts” were humans who threatened him.⁷ In any case this passage draws

6. Adolf Deissmann was an early proponent of an imprisonment in Ephesus. See his *St. Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History*, trans. W. E. Wilson, 2nd ed. (New York: Doran, 1926), 16–18, with a long bibliographic footnote. It was Deissmann who encouraged Duncan to look into the issue, which resulted in a book that was very influential in English-language scholarship. Duncan’s chap. 5 discusses the history of the topic: G. S. Duncan, *St. Paul’s Ephesian Ministry: A Reconstruction with Special Reference to the Ephesian Origin of the Imprisonment Epistles* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1929).

attention to major difficulties, which might have included imprisonment, in Ephesus. It is therefore highly tempting to put one of Paul's imprisonments in Ephesus.

Besides Paul's statement of affliction and danger in Ephesus, also in favor of an Ephesian imprisonment is the difficulty of travel between Philippi and either Caesarea or Rome. The bare outline of events listed above requires these trips: (1) someone traveled from Paul (wherever he was) to Philippi, informing the church of his captivity; (2) Epaphroditus undertook a journey from Philippi to bring Paul material and moral assistance; (3) someone traveled from Paul to Philippi to tell the church that Epaphroditus was gravely ill; (4) a messenger from the Philippians, expressing their concern, was sent to Paul from Philippi.

All this took place within the period of Paul's imprisonment. It is a fairly short trip from Ephesus to Philippi; the distance from either Caesarea or Rome to Philippi is great.⁸ Since it is doubtful that Paul's imprisonment lasted for years, the likelihood of an imprisonment fairly close to Philippi is enhanced.

It is noteworthy that, when Paul wrote Philippians, he hoped to visit Philippi himself in the near future, when he was released: "when I come to you again" (1:26); "I trust in the Lord that I shall also come soon" (2:24). This makes good sense if Paul was in Ephesus. According to Rom. 15:24, which he wrote to Rome from Corinth, once he reached Rome he planned to extend his efforts westward, going from Rome to Spain. If he wrote Philippians from Rome, and

7. Duncan (*Imprisonment*, 130) proposed that during a tumult the crowd cried out that Paul should be thrown to the lions. In this case, he faced the threat of fighting with wild beasts.

8. Duncan (*Imprisonment*, 80–82), citing Deissmann, estimates that a journey between Philippi and Ephesus would take from seven to ten days; my own estimate is ten days (see above, chap. 5 n. 8). A trip from Philippi to Rome would require three times that. The trip would include a land journey of about 740 miles plus a two-day sea crossing. If, on the land trip, the men and a pack animal walked, 740 miles would require about thirty days. For further information on travel times, see above, p. 129 n. 8.

intended to return east to Philippi, this would mean that he had decided to scrap his plans for a westward thrust in favor of revisiting the churches in eastern Europe and western Asia Minor.

Next we note that the evidence of the letter to Philemon points toward an imprisonment in Ephesus. Paul wrote this personal letter concerning Onesimus when he was in prison (Philem. 10, 13), and he wrote of his plan to visit Philemon and even requested that Philemon prepare a guest room in Colossae (Philem. 22), which is where Philemon and Onesimus lived (Col. 4:9). Colossae is very near to Ephesus. This proposed visit, like a future trip to Philippi, almost entirely rules out the possibility that Paul wrote these two “prison epistles” from either Caesarea or Rome.

Proponents of the view that the prison epistles were written from Rome have sometimes made a major point of Paul’s saying that his imprisonment “for Christ” was known “throughout the whole *praitōrion*” (Phil. 1:13), the Greek spelling of the Latin *praetorium*. This word is often translated “imperial guard” (NRSV), despite the fact that the word *guard* is not in the text. To many, the term *praetorium*, even without “guard,” has implied that Paul was in Rome when he wrote.

Moreover, Philippians ends with these words: “all the saints greet you, especially those of the emperor’s household [literally, “Caesar’s house”].” Where could Paul have been, save in Rome, held by the Praetorian Guard, in close proximity to Nero’s palace?

It turns out that he could have been in a lot of other places. The common term for the bodyguard of a general was *praetoria cohors*: a cohort or company of soldiers who protect the *praetor*, “the chief”—whatever his precise rank or title. From the time of Augustus the *princeps* (usually called “the emperor” in English) had a very large and important personal bodyguard called “the praetorians.”⁹ It has

9. OCD3, 1241.

often been assumed that only the emperor had a “praetorian guard,” with the result that when Paul wrote that everyone in “the *praitōrion*” knew of him he meant “everyone in the guard around Caesar.”

In fact the first meaning of the Latin word *praetorium* (without “cohort”) is this: “the general’s tent” (if in an army camp) or “the governor’s residence” (in a province).¹⁰ Thus there were a lot of *praetoria* in the empire.

One gets the same result from looking at the meaning of the Paul’s Greek word in Liddell and Scott’s Greek-English lexicon. *Praitōrion* is the official residence of a governor. The NRSV’s “imperial guard” should be simply “the governor’s headquarters.”¹¹

From this we see that when Paul wrote that everyone in the *praitōrion* knew that he was imprisoned for Christ, he meant “everyone in government house” or “everyone working in the governor’s residence.”

Similarly, when Paul wrote to the Philippians that “the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar’s house” (4:2), he did not mean that he was personally acquainted with the relatives and confidants of Nero. Rather, he knew some Christians who worked in the residence of the governor, who was the emperor’s representative.

It is possible that “Caesar’s house” has a more specific meaning than “government house.” Besides the proconsul who was appointed by the Senate to serve as governor in a major city or province, each place of importance also had one or more “procurators,” who were responsible to look after the emperor’s *private* domains—and the emperors inherited from previous systems of government a lot of

10. Charlton T. Lewis, *A Latin Dictionary for Schools*, repr. (1889; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 803. This is an abbreviated version of Lewis and Short’s Latin dictionary.

11. It is odd that the NRSV mistranslated *praitōrion* in Philippians, since the translation of the word in other passages (Matt. 27:27; Mark 15:16; John 18:28, 33; 19:9; Acts 23:35) is perfectly correct: “the governor’s headquarters”; “Herod’s headquarters;” and so on. The NIV made a similar mistake: “palace guard” in Philippians; “palace” in John. Both followed the American Standard Version. The King James Version correctly had “palace.”

private domains.¹² These procurators, with their staffs of slaves and freedmen, would quite naturally be called “Caesar’s household.” Thus it is possible that Paul distinguished between “government house” (*praitōrion*, 1:13), ruled by the proconsul, whose employees knew that he was imprisoned for the sake of Christ, and “Caesar’s house,” the emperor’s private domain managed by the procurators (at the time there were two in Ephesus), some of whose employees were Christians (“saints,” 4:22).¹³

It would be quite reasonable for detainees (which, as we shall see, is what Paul was) to be housed somewhere in or near the building where the governor lived and where the offices of government were. Ephesus was a huge city (sometimes reckoned to be third in size, after Rome and Alexandria) and an extremely important one. It was the capital of the province of Asia and was on the most direct route from Italy to the East. “Caesar” would have had many employees there.

Finally, we must clarify “prison” and “prisoners.” The ancient world did not have the modern concept of *prison sentences* as punishments for misdeeds, the length of the imprisonment corresponding to the severity of the crime. In the case of Paul’s two substantial imprisonments as described in Acts—in Caesarea (chap. 24) and Rome (28:26–30)—he was simply being held in custody until he could be tried: prison was not a punishment.

In Roman law, there was a wide variety of punishments, such as fines, confiscation of property, flogging, a few versions of exile (for the higher classes), being sentenced to the mines or quarries, being sentenced to a gladiatorial school, and various types of

12. On these procurators, see *OCD*3, 1251–252, especially item 4. For the emperor’s domains, see *ibid.*, 490–91.

13. Tacitus provides the names of the top officials in Ephesus at the beginning of Nero’s reign (54 CE): Iunius Silanus was the proconsul appointed by the Senate. By order of Agrippina, however, the procurators, Publius Celer, a knight, and Helius, a freedman, poisoned Silanus (Tacitus, *Annals* 13.1).

execution—including being sentenced to fight unarmed against gladiators or wild animals. “Prison” was usually a short-term expedient for coercing the disobedient or for holding them until the date of execution, until the date of combat, and the like.

In most cases, misdeeds were punished by corporal punishment—such as beating with rods or execution. Exile was used to get rid of people without executing them, but as far as I can tell it was reserved for the well-to-do, since the exile had to support himself or herself, or be supported by family or friends.¹⁴

Prisoners were held in prison for one of two reasons: (1) having been condemned, to await the time of execution; (2) having been accused without conclusive evidence, to be detained while under investigation. Thus we do not have to imagine that there was somewhere in Ephesus a huge prison with hundreds or even dozens of cells, with a large staff to feed the inmates.

Roman prisons were not pleasant places. Many were underground, with no provision for the disposal of human waste. Prisoners might or might not be shackled to the walls. Visitors, however, would be allowed to clean up the prisoner’s area and provide clean clothes and a blanket.

But not all prisoners were treated in the same way. There was such a thing as house arrest (as depicted in Acts 28:16). Prosperous prisoners who could provide bribes and who were not flight risks might even have a modicum of comfort. Paul’s reference to the Christians (“saints”) in Caesar’s house (4:22) suggests that he had friends and some freedom of movement and acquaintance. It is clear that he could see and converse with visitors (Onesimus and Epaphroditus). The Christians in Caesar’s house, who were servants

14. On the various punishments and prison conditions, see, for example, Richard A. Bauman, *Crime and Punishment in Ancient Rome* (London: Routledge, 1996). On sentences to the amphitheatre to be slaughtered for the amusement of the crowds, see J. P. V. D. Balsdon, *Life and Leisure in Ancient Rome*, repr. (1969; New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002), 288–89, 308–9.

or staff members, may have been able to improve his conditions. Paul probably did not suffer the most severe hardships of prison. I think that it is certain that he was not chained to the wall underground, and he probably was held above ground.¹⁵

Probably Onesimus could provide only personal services to Paul, not money (since he was a runaway slave), but personal services were very important (Philem. 13). During the imprisonment that is the subject of Philippians, Timothy was with Paul and was free to travel (Phil. 1:1; 2:19), and he probably saw to the personal services that Paul required. When Epaphroditus arrived, he “served Paul’s need” (Phil. 2:25), which certainly included bringing money. That on this occasion as well as on others the Philippians sent money is clear in Phil. 4:15–20. After Epaphroditus fell ill, however, he could not have done much for Paul in the way of cleaning his quarters and providing fresh clothing.

During the Ephesian imprisonment, Paul was doubtless under investigation—detained while the police made their enquiries, as we might now say. He had not been sentenced to death or to a worse fate, such as being sent to the mines. A mere detention could, of course, stretch out: the evidence might be mixed; different groups might appeal to the governor, presenting conflicting views; the governor might simply dilly-dally indecisively or while awaiting a larger bribe. Paul’s detention must have lasted for months because of the time required for the coming and going of messages described above. No one could say when the governor might come to a

15. There is an extremely long story in Josephus about Agrippa I (Herod’s grandson), who spent many of his younger years in Rome and who was a boyhood friend of Gaius (Caligula). Agrippa was overheard saying that he wished that Gaius could soon replace Tiberius as emperor. Tiberius had him imprisoned under severe conditions. Agrippa, however, had friends in high places, who saw to it that he could bathe every day, have clean clothes, and have other privileges. (Josephus, *Antiq.* 18.206; the story begins at *Antiq.* 18.168). Paul did not have friends in high places, as far as we know, but Christians who worked in the palace or in “Caesar’s household” may well have been able to persuade the guards to let them ease Paul’s lot.

decision. On the whole, Paul seems to have been quite optimistic about his eventual release, though it did occur to him that he might die before being set free (Phil. 1:18–26).

As we saw above, the letter to Philemon is even more optimistic: Paul requests Philemon to prepare a guest room for him (Philem. 22).

We do not know whether or not Philippians and Philemon were written during the same captivity, since Paul boasted of imprisonments (plural) (2 Cor. 11:23). The evidence that leads to the view that Paul was imprisoned in Ephesus applies to both letters. We may doubt that he was imprisoned in Ephesus more than once, and so I incline to the view that Philippians and Philemon were written during the same captivity.

What had he done that required investigation? We do not know. Acts has a story of a hubbub created by the complaints of silver workers in Ephesus who fashioned and sold replicas of the temple of Artemis. These artisans charged that the Christians discouraged clients by persuading them that “gods made with hands are not gods” (Acts 19:26; cf. Acts 19:23–41). Acts is, however, very careful to distance Paul himself from the small upheaval, and there is no report of anyone’s being arrested.

Later in Acts, when Paul is sailing from Greece to Jerusalem, he decides not to stop in Ephesus, but instead asks the leaders of the Ephesian church to meet him in Miletus. For some reason he wished to bypass Ephesus. In his speech to the elders, he states that while he had been in Asia (i.e., Ephesus) he “endur[ed] the trials that came to [him] through the plots of the Jews” (Acts 20:19; cf. Acts 20:13–19). The “trials” are not specified.

Still later, when Paul was in the temple in Jerusalem, “the Jews from Asia” (Ephesus) saw him and roused the crowd by shouting, “Fellow Israelites, help! This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against our people, our law, and this place; more than

that, he has actually brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place” (Acts 21:27–28).

It seems to me possible that behind these accounts there may be the fact that, when preaching in a synagogue in Ephesus, Paul roused some of the members to wrath, and there may have been a hubbub concerning Paul *in Ephesus* that the author of Acts chose not to report. The author’s bias is to argue that whatever trouble Paul got into was the fault of “the Jews,” and that Roman officials were always on his side in these disputes.¹⁶ The author would have been reluctant to write that the proconsul who governed the great city of Ephesus held Paul in detention for several months on this or any other occasion.

Despite this bias, Acts clearly reveals essential points concerning Paul’s arrests and punishments. The first responsibility of Roman officials throughout the empire was to maintain peace and order. In the pursuit of this goal, they would beat or execute as many people as need be “for the good of the empire.” If local leaders did not calm an uproar quickly enough, the governor would act. A “hubbub,” it seems to me, is the most likely event that would have led a governor to detain and investigate Paul. Acts 17 describes this sort of tumult, which disturbed “the people and the city officials” (17:8). Acts 16 describes a disturbance caused by Paul’s exorcising a girl, which led the magistrates to strip and beat Paul and Silas, and then imprison them (16:16–24). Usually, however, in Acts it is “the Jews” who make trouble for Paul.

I believe it to be impossible to reconstruct precisely the events surrounding Paul’s arrest and imprisonment. The point of the present discussion is merely this: Paul’s message and activities sometimes

16. Acts wanted to emphasize that Rome had nothing to fear from the Christian movement and thus emphasizes the innocence of Paul before Sergius Paulus (Acts 13), Gallio (chap. 18), and Festus (chap. 25); see pp. 15–17.

led to enough public controversy to attract the attention of Roman officials, and this in general is the most likely reason for his having been beaten with rods and forcibly detained while under investigation.

I believe that Acts is quite correct in offering two sources of “uproar”: either conflict with pagan religion or conflict with members of a synagogue. That the latter occurred is proved by 2 Cor. 11:24: “five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.” Paul’s accepting this punishment means that he considered himself to be a loyal Jew and that he continued to go to synagogue. He may not have wanted his gentile converts to observe the Sabbath, but he was a Jew, and he spent part of the Sabbath in the synagogue.

The Relative Date of Philippians

If it is probable that Paul wrote Philippians while he was in prison in Ephesus, what is its place in the sequence of his surviving letters?

I think that the question of when the letter was written is subject to an easier resolution than the question of where Paul was imprisoned, and it is the one that is more important in the present book: Philippians fits very nicely between Galatians and Romans.

Without Galatians, it would be almost impossible to account for Phil. 3:2–16. Everything about Galatians indicates that the news from there hit Paul very hard. When he heard from the Galatians, this must have been the first news he had received that indicated that there was a substantial effort on the part of some Christian leaders or teachers to overthrow the foundation of his mission. Paul had been admitting gentile converts to the people of God without requiring their conversion to Judaism, which, in the case of males, required circumcision.

He had, however, also told the converts that the Bible (the LXX) contained the truth about God and his people. Paul’s enemies were

biblicists. They pointed out that Abraham—father of the chosen people—was circumcised and that the Bible said that no male who was uncircumcised could be a “son of Abraham” (Gen. 17:14).

As we noted when we discussed Galatians, this fundamentalist argument had a lot of force. Since it invalidated Paul’s mission, he replied with vigor. He employed every plea and every threat and every denunciation at his disposal. He also constructed an answering argument: those who are in Christ *are* the descendants of Abraham.¹⁷

The opponents in Galatia presumably did not originate in the congregations in Galatia, but his first news of their activities came from Galatia. Therefore the brief denunciation and counterargument of Phil. 3:23 (“. . . beware of those who mutilate the flesh! For it is we who are the circumcision . . .”) cannot have been written before Paul wrote Galatians. In Philippians, the passage is a warning about emissaries who may trouble them in the future, the existence of whom Paul learned from Galatia. There is no sign that the Philippians were, like the Galatians, thinking of accepting circumcision or, worse, beginning to accept circumcision. He had already developed arguments against the circumcision party, and he repeats part of them in Phil. 3:2–16 (which we shall consider below). We may be as confident about this sequence as we are about anything that has to do with Paul’s letters: Paul wrote Galatians before he wrote Philippians.

Philippians also shows close relationships to Romans. One of the things that makes me admire so much the nineteenth-century commentaries of J. B. Lightfoot is that he prints a lot of evidence. In this case he has two pages of parallels between Philippians and Romans, commenting, “I do not think that so many and so close parallels [to Philippians] can be produced with any other Epistle [than Romans].”¹⁸

17. For this argument over circumcision, see above, chap. 16.

18. Lightfoot, *Philippians*, 41–43.

I shall print a few of these and then list all of the parallels by chapter and verse:

<u>Philippians</u>	<u>Romans</u>
2:2 that you may have the same mind	12:6 having the same mind
2:4 look not to your own interests but	12:10 outdo one another in showing honor to the interests of others
3:3 for we are the circumcision	2:28 for a person is not a Jew who is one outwardly . . . a person is a Jew who is one inwardly
3:5 a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin	11:1 an Israelite, descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin
3:9 not having my own righteousness	10:3 seeking to establish their own righteousness
3:9 the righteousness from God based on faith	9:32 they did not strive for it [righteousness] on the basis of faith
3:10 sharing his sufferings by becoming like him in his death	6:5 if we have been united with him in a death like his

The full list of parallel passages as Lightfoot gave them is this:

<u>Philippians</u>	<u>Romans</u>
1:3, 4, 7, 8	1:9-11
1:10	2:18
2:8, 9, 10, 11	14:9, 11
2:2-4	12:16-19; 12:10
3:3	2:28; 1:9; 5:11
4:5	11:1
3:9	10:3; 9:31-32
3:10-11, 21	6:5; 8:29
3:19	6:21; 16:18
4:8	12:1

As we shall see in the next chapter, Romans contains many of the themes that one finds in the Corinthian correspondence, Galatians, and Philippians. The simplest explanation is that Romans was written after the other letters. And, in fact, Romans is now generally regarded the last of the authentic Pauline letters.

On the questions of righteousness, circumcision, and becoming one person with Christ, Philippians is about halfway between Galatians and Romans. Thus I place Philippians next-to-last: after Galatians and the Corinthian correspondence and before Romans.

Major Topics

We dealt with the first topic, Paul's imprisonment, under the heading of where Paul was when he wrote to the Philippians. Before considering the other major topics in the letter, we shall examine one more point that requires clarification: the letter is addressed "to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons" (1:1). Who are the bishops and deacons?

In the second century, it was usual for each church to be governed by a bishop, who was aided by deacons (often called "ministers"). The address to the Philippians sounds as if the Philippian church had developed a hierarchy of officials long before the rest of the Christian churches. The fact that both words are *plural*, however, immediately indicates that there was no "monarchical" bishop.

Scholars have long realized that in Philippians both terms (bishops and deacons) are used in their general senses, not in their later official meanings. "Bishop" is a translation of *episkopos*, which means "overseer," and which was used in all sorts of contexts. It is highly probable that here it has the same meaning as "elders" (*presbyteroi*), since in early Christian literature *episkopoi* and *presbyteroi* are often used interchangeably, as in Acts 20:17 and 20:28. Paul summons the

“elders” (20:17) but addresses them as “overseers” (20:28).¹⁹ “Elders” was a common term for the senior males who were in charge of things, and so it is not surprising that they are occasionally called “overseers.”²⁰

The word *elders* (*presbyteroi*) abounds in the New Testament, being frequently used in the Gospels to refer to a class of Jewish leaders (e.g., “scribes and elders,” “chief priests and elders,” Matt. 16:21; 21:23). It also refers to Christian leaders (e.g., Acts 11:30). “Apostles and elders” are referred to throughout Acts 15 and 16. Why Paul this time used “overseers” (*episkopoi*) rather than “elders” (*presbyteroi*) we do not know. It may have been a preference of the senior males in Philippi to have a slightly different title.

The “deacons” (*diakonoi*) are “servers” or “helpers,” and the root *diakon-* is very common in the New Testament. It did not yet connote a specific office.

Thus we can say that within the Philippian church, as elsewhere, there were “leaders” (here called *episkopoi*) and “helpers” (*diakonoi*) but that these were not yet official positions in a hierarchy. In Corinth, the household of Stephanas constituted part of the leadership of the church, but Paul does not offer a *title* for their leadership (1 Cor. 15:15–16). Possibly Philippians shows that a desire for titles was growing, but this would be stretching the point.

We should recall, however, that in 1 Cor. 12:27–31 there is a hierarchy of duties and activities: “first apostles, second prophets, third teachers,” and so on. The Corinthians could aspire to any of these gifts—except that of being apostles.

19. Lightfoot’s essay “The Synonyms ‘Bishop’ and ‘Presbyter’” presents the issue in persuasive detail (*Philippians*, 93–97). The equation is generally accepted.

20. That senior males ran things is indicated by the terminology for ruling bodies: in Greek *gerousia* (council of old men, related to our “geriatric”) and in Latin *senatus* (council of old men, related to our “senescent”).

The Special Relationship between Paul and the Philippians

The beginning of the letter as we now have it is very warm in its praise of the Philippians, who shared “in the gospel from the first day until now” (1:5). They hold Paul in their hearts; they share in God’s grace with him, and he longs to see them (1:7-8). “Sharing in the gospel” (more literally, “sharing unto the gospel,” i.e., sharing in its furtherance) almost certainly refers to financial aid. We may recall (from chap. 16) that in 2 Corinthians 8 Paul wrote a panegyric on the financial generosity of the churches of Macedonia (Thessalonica and Philippi): “they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means” (2 Cor. 8:3). These donations were part of the collection that Paul was taking up in order to assist the Christians in Jerusalem.

Now we learn that the financial generosity of the Philippians had been extended to Paul over a substantial period of time. The Philippian church helped subsidize Paul’s efforts in the nearby city, Thessalonica (Phil. 4:16), and this assistance continued when Paul left Macedonia: “You Philippians indeed know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you alone” (4:15). Thus the financial aid they sent to Paul via Epaphroditus was part of an ongoing history of the Philippians’ readiness to put money at Paul’s disposal.

After thanking the Philippians for supporting him so often, Paul immediately shows a trace of his defensiveness about taking money, which we discussed in the chapters on 1 Thessalonians and 2 Corinthians 8. He did not want to be accused of doing what he does for financial gain. Thus Phil. 4:17: “Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the profit that accumulates to your account.” In comparison to 1

Thess. 2:5, this is very mild defensiveness, and it probably shows that Paul knew that the Philippians would not suspect him of greed.

Paul names no particular individuals as being his supporters. One would dearly love to know whether or not there was a main benefactor in the church. In Rom. 16:1, Paul names a patroness, Phoebe, but he does not single out anyone in Philippi. There may have been one or more major donors, but it is also possible that the Philippian congregation as a whole simply dug deeper into their pockets than Paul's other churches.

In any case, Paul had an intimate bond, which included "giving and receiving," with the Philippians.

Paul's Most Stoic Moment

What I think of as "Paul's most Stoic moment" is connected to the discussion of money. In the following translation of Phil. 4:11–12 from the NRSV, I shall underline the words of the English translation that *fail* to give the impression that an ancient Greek reader would have received:

Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need.

The word translated "content" in the NRSV and most English translations is *autarkēs*, usually translated as "self-sufficient." This is the adjectival form; the corresponding noun is *autarkeia*, "self-sufficiency," which Paul used in 2 Cor. 9:8. In Cynic and Stoic philosophy, "self-sufficiency" was extremely important. It was closely related to *apathēs* (from which we get "apathy").²¹ *Apathēs* means

21. On self-sufficiency in the thought of the Cynics and the Stoics, including the relationship

“incapable of suffering.” To be *autarkēs* was to be self-sufficient in the sense of being indifferent to circumstances.

For the Stoics and others, the only thing that matters is one’s virtue, and one’s circumstances should not affect the character of the inner person—his or her virtue. If Caesar calls you to his palace, you should remain serene. He might rape your wife, seize your property, and order you to commit suicide, or he might make you rich, but you should remain tranquil, since he cannot deprive you of your virtue, which is independent of both good fortune and the “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” (to quote a later philosopher).²² Or, to quote still later advice to the same point,

“If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
 “And treat those two impostors just the same,
 . . .
 “You’ll be a Man, my son!”²³

I have been told that the first two lines quoted have been immortalized by being written above the players’ entrance to the Centre Court of the All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club, where the Wimbledon Championships are held. In Britain this would be called “keeping a stiff upper lip.” In the Greco-Roman world it was called being *autarkēs*. The translation “being content” is not incorrect, but it cannot convey the weight and importance of the word that Paul uses. It means to be above such petty things as poverty, homelessness, and pain.

Let us go on to the next part of 4:11 in the NRSV, “[content] with whatever I have.” The Greek *en hois eimi* is broader than “whatever I have” and should be translated, with Lightfoot, “in the position in

between *autarkēs* and *apathēs*, see J. M. Rist, *Stoic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 54–64.

22. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 3.1.

23. Rudyard Kipling, “If-” (c. 1910).

which I am placed,” or with the NIV, “whatever the circumstances.” It is not only a matter of Paul’s possessions, but of his entire situation and condition.

Paul continues (in the NRSV), “I know what it is to have *little*, and I know what it is to have *plenty*.” In this case, there is much to be said for the KJV: “I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound.” The conditions intended are more extreme than “little” and “plenty.” The Greek verb *tapeinoō*, translated “have little” (NRSV) and “be abased” (KJV), has a range of meanings: “to lower,” “to humble,” “to humiliate” “to abase,” or “to degrade.” In this case, as well as in the other two cases in which Paul uses this verb of himself (2 Cor. 11:7; 12:21), the meaning is closer to “humiliate,” “abase,” or “degrade” than to “humble.” “To be humble,” to our ear, need be no stronger than “to be meek and mild,” and as such may even be a good quality.

Paul, who has been beaten by rods, flogged in synagogues, and thrown into prison, had been abased, degraded, and humiliated—much worse than “having little.” Moreover, the same verb (*tapeinoō*) appears in the Christ hymn (Phil. 2:8). Christ did not just “humble” himself (becoming meek and mild), he degraded himself, going as low as death by crucifixion—the penalty meted out to rebellious slaves.

Similarly when Paul says (according to most translations) that he knows what it is “to have plenty,” the word is better translated “to be rich,” or, as he says in 4:18, “to have more than enough.”

In short, in these brief verses about his self-sufficiency—a quality admired by all philosophers and thinkers—he writes in extreme terms. He maintains his equanimity not just when times are a little better or a little worse, but all the way from degraded circumstances to wealth.

I have done my best to explain what anyone who knew about the Cynics or Stoics would derive from Paul’s description of himself. But, in the end, Paul does not claim for himself precisely the status that

the noblest philosophers prized: maintaining virtue and serenity in all circumstances by the strength of one's own character; rather he owes his achievement to God: "I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (4:13).

I called this passage "Paul's most Stoic moment" because it so closely corresponds to the Cynic-Stoic ideal—though the conclusion, thanks to God, is different. Paul was not "a Stoic": he was not a philosopher at all, but rather the evangelist of a Jewish eschatological movement. It would be hard, however, to be a literate, thinking person, who heard public lectures, or a devout Jew who attended a synagogue in which there were learned men, without running into a good deal of Greek philosophy.

To match the most Stoic moment in Philippians, we may recall the most Platonic moment in 2 Cor. 4:18: "for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal." That the real world is the world of ideas, which cannot be seen except with the mind's eye, is an important aspect of Platonic thought. (See p. 411.)

By Paul's day there had been a good deal of mingling of philosophical views; more accurately, we should say that the schools borrowed from one another. We see a remarkable amount of eclecticism and selective borrowing in Philo, Paul's older contemporary. H. A. Wolfson spent a whole page merely listing the philosophers upon whom Philo drew.²⁴ He then explained the very large role that the Stoics played in the spread of philosophical ideas.

Stoicism is most frequently drawn upon [by Philo]; its terminology and phraseology occur in every topic of philosophy touched upon by Philo. The Stoics were great disseminators of knowledge which they borrowed from others and are too often given credit by historians for views to which their only contribution was a change in the vocabulary or a minute classification or reclassification of parts of a general view held by

24. Harry Austryn Wolfson, *Philo*, repr. (1947; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 1:93–94.

others. . . . Philo . . . merely shows that like many others of his time he used the Stoic compilations as a short cut to philosophic knowledge.²⁵

This gives us an idea of what a very highly educated man whose family was rich enough to hire a Greek tutor, and who could buy texts, might have read: Stoic compilations, plus some original sources. Paul's education was a long way from Philo's, with the important exception of his knowledge of the text of the Septuagint—but he would have acquired some knowledge of *main themes* in Greek philosophy. It is noteworthy that the two most obvious points of dependence on Greek philosophy show knowledge of one of the major points of Platonism and one of the major points of Stoicism.

Eschatology and Perfection

In Philippians, Paul refers several times to “the day of Jesus Christ” or “the day of Christ” (1:6, 10; 2:16). In other letters one finds “the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:8); “the day of the Lord” (1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Thess. 5:2); and “the day of our Lord Jesus” (2 Cor. 1:14). In Philippians, most of the “the day” passages come early in the letter. They serve to remind readers of the first great reality: the day is coming when God will transform believers, so that they may have eternal life.

While they wait, they should be perfect: they should so live that in “the day of Christ” they will be “pure and blameless” (Phil. 1:10). The word translated “pure” has especially the connotation of “having sincere motives.” Paul uses the corresponding noun in 1 Cor. 5:8 (“sincerity and truth”); 2 Cor. 1:12 (“holiness and sincerity”); 2 Cor. 2:17 (Paul's own sincerity contrasted with “peddlers of God's word”).

Paul's urging of moral perfection has in view the soon-to-arrive “day of Christ.” This is reminiscent of one of Paul's admonitions

25. Ibid., 1:111.

to the Thessalonians: “And may [God] so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints” (1 Thess. 3:13). The Protestant emphasis on faith (which is indeed crucial to Paul) should not make readers forget his moral perfectionism.²⁶

The Christ Hymn: Philippians 2:6-11

A lot of hymns from the ancient world survive in whole or in part. By “hymn” I mean a poem that was sung to honor or praise a hero or a god. It is probable that these were sung at religious festivals—the gathering of large numbers of people to worship a god, principally by sacrifice, but also by prayer and praise. From the Greek world the most famous collections of hymns are the Homeric Hymns and the Orphic Hymns.²⁷ During festivals in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem, the Levites sang from the book of Psalms, some of which count as “hymns.”²⁸

From Phil. 2:6-11 we learn that someone wrote a hymn to Christ as to a god.²⁹ The author is a little chary of saying “Christ was God,” as in fact is true in the New Testament in general. Here we read that “he was in the form of God” and he “did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited.” The Greek word translated “exploited” in the NRSV is *harpagmon*, a very rare word, whose meaning is not clear. The NIV translates “something to be grasped.” The Jerusalem Bible offers “did not cling to his equality

26. For lists of Paul’s terminology for behavior, whether good or bad, see Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 6–9. For discussion of the relationship to “law” see pp. 111–13.

27. For an overview and a brief classification of Greek hymns see OCD3, 735–37. On the New Testament christological hymns, see Jack T. Sanders, *The New Testament Christological Hymns*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 15 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971).

28. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief* (London: SCM, 1992), 81, citing *Antiq.* 20.216–18.

29. Scholars on the whole doubt that Paul himself wrote the hymn, partly because its main ideas do not appear elsewhere in the letter. I do not see any reason to disagree with the majority.

with God.” Lightfoot paraphrased, “*Though* He existed in the form of God, *yet* He did not look upon equality with God as a prize which must not slip from His grasp.”³⁰

In any case, “equality with,” like “form of,” avoids the direct identification of Christ with God. The New Testament authors had not yet thought of the idea of the Trinity, and so making Christ a part of a larger Godhead was not an option. His precise relationship to God was usually just called “sonship,” which could have a broad meaning, as we shall see when we discuss Romans 1. All Israelites were in some sense “sons of God.”

In later years, Paul’s use of “*form* of God” and “being found in human *form*,” would lead to numerous debates: was he God or human merely in *appearance*? In particular, was he a real human? Fortunately we do not have to delve into this. The hymn as written uses “form of” to mean “possessed at least some of the characteristics of,” not merely “appeared to be.” On the other hand, “possessed at least some of the characteristics of” proposes less *identity* between God and Jesus than is expressed in the much later formulation, that God and Christ were of the same *ousia*, “essence.”

Though the hymn does not state precisely how Jesus Christ and God related to each other, it does make one important christological claim: Christ existed before he appeared as a human, and a lowly human at that: he took “the form of a slave” and submitted himself to a cruel death (2:7–8).

The hymn continues by saying that, just as Christ abased himself to an extreme degree, God “hyper-exalted” him, bestowing on him a name that is above every name, with the result that every knee should bend to him and every tongue confess that he is Lord (2:9–11). This formulation, “every knee should bend and every tongue confess” is a

30. Lightfoot, *Philippians*, 109.

quotation of Isa. 45:23, where it is spoken by God with reference to himself: “to me every knee should bow.” Paul quotes this passage in its original sense in Rom. 14:11.

The terminology of bending the knee to Christ and confessing his *lordship*, however, doubtless precedes the composition of the hymn. Paul requires the confession that Christ is “Lord” in Rom. 10:9. In 1 Cor. 12:3, he states that “no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit.”

There has been a great deal of discussion of the “history-of-religions background” of the main themes of the hymn, which has centered on the famous dying and rising deities of the ancient world, such as Persephone in Greek mythology, Adonis in Syria, and Osiris in Egypt.³¹

We should also note a couple of partial parallels in Jewish literature. Many comparisons have been made between the Christ of the hymn and the “Suffering Servant” of Isaiah 53. There is also a partial parallel in the *Mekilta* (a rabbinic commentary on Exodus). Since this is relatively inaccessible, I shall print it in Jacob Lauterbach’s translation.

And so you find that whenever Israel is enslaved the Shekinah [the presence of God] is enslaved with them. . . . And it also says: “In all their affliction He was afflicted” (Isa. 63.10). So far I know only that He shares in the affliction of the community. How about the affliction of the individual? Scripture says: “He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble” (Ps. 91.15).

. . .

Likewise you find that whithersoever Israel was exiled, the Shekinah, as it were, went into exile with them.³²

31. Brief introductions to these mythological figures are available in numerous places, such as *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, ed. Karel van der Toorn et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1999). For Persephone, see the article on “Demeter.”

32. Jacob Z. Lauterbach, ed. and trans., *Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1933), 113 (Pisha 14). The *Mekilta* is the Tannaitic commentary on Exodus, and most of the rabbis quoted in it are relatively early—appreciably

The idea that the Lord or the deity shares in human suffering was important in large parts of the ancient world.

The Two Dispensations: 2 Corinthians 3 and Philippians 3

The heading of this section names one of the largest and most important theological topics in Paul, rivaled in importance only by Paul's soteriological discussions (righteousness by faith, being one person with Christ). If one calls this issue a *problem* rather than a *topic*, it ranks first in importance. As Paul understood things by the time he wrote Galatians and Romans, the two divine dispensations constituted the major theological problem that he faced.

First, God called Abraham, required circumcision of him and his descendants, and gave the law by the hand of Moses. He promised to protect and foster the Israelites if they kept his law. Later he decided to send Christ to save people whether they were under the first dispensation or not. How can the two dispensations be reconciled?

We saw Paul's problem with the Mosaic law in Galatians, and in Romans we shall see both his difficulty with the law and his assertion that the election of Israel still stands. In the two sections below we see a post-Galatians and pre-Romans stage of his struggle with the two dispensations.

2 Corinthians 3:7-18

In discussing the Corinthian correspondence (chap. 14) I omitted aspects of 2 Cor. 3:7-18 in order to consider them here, alongside Phil. 3:3-21. Early in the letter of reconciliation (2 Cor. 1-9), after mentioning letters of recommendation (p. 246 above), Paul wrote that "You [the Corinthians] are a letter of Christ . . . written not on

earlier than those of *Midrash Rabbah*. The material, however, is traditional, and it is extremely difficult or impossible to date individual passages.

tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts (2 Cor. 3:3).” Stone tablets doubtless reminded him of the law of Moses, engraved on two tablets of stone. He continued: God “has made us competent to be ministers [*diakonous*] of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” Here he explicitly refers to both of the dispensations. One kills, the other gives life. This is not, however, his full view of the first dispensation.

I shall quote the rest of the passage in full, enumerating the paragraphs, underlining the words “Moses’ face” and “veil,” and italicizing “*glory*” and “*diakonia*.”

1. Now if the ministry [*diakonia*] of death, chiseled in letters on stone tablets, came in *glory* so that the people of Israel could not gaze at Moses’ face because of the *glory* of his face, a *glory* now set aside, how much more does the ministry [*diakonia*] of the Spirit come in *glory*? For if there was *glory* in the ministry [*diakonia*] of condemnation, much more does the ministry [*diakonia*] of righteousness abound in *glory*! Indeed, what once had *glory* has lost its *glory* because of the greater *glory*; for if what was set aside came through *glory*, much more has the permanent come in *glory*!
2. Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness, not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the *glory* that was being set aside. But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside. Indeed, to this very day, whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds, but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.
3. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with *unveiled* faces, are being

transformed into the same image from one degree of *glory* to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

The references to Moses' face and the veil are from the story of God's giving the law to Moses on Mount Sinai in Exod. 34:29–35. When Moses first walked down the mountain, with the two tablets of the law in his hands, his face was glowing or shining (Exod. 34:29). The Israelites, including even Aaron, feared to approach him. He persuaded them to come near, however, so that he could give them the commandments of God (34:32). But when he finished speaking, he put a veil over his face (34:33). He continued to go up the mountain to converse with God and down again. When he approached God he took the veil off, but after he had delivered his message to the Israelites he put it on again (34:34–35).

For the most part, Paul's use of this passage is so straightforward that it needs little comment. *Diakonia*, translated “ministry,” is used in two slightly different senses in Paul. The basic meaning of the word is “service.” At the beginning of this chapter we noted that deacons (*diakonoí*) would later serve bishops. Paul uses *diakonia* to refer to his own service, or ministry, as in Rom. 11:13, “I glorify my own ministry,” or Rom.15:31, “my ministry for Jerusalem.” It may also apply more widely to a body of services or to the instruments of services. In our passage it is correctly translated “dispensation,” a whole set of practices. It is the equivalent of “covenant”: “new covenant” (2 Cor. 3:6); “old covenant” (3:14).

Paul states that the old dispensation was glorious—in fact, *very* glorious, so glorious that Moses' face was radiant. It has, however, been set aside in favor of the new dispensation—God's sending of Jesus. Looking backward, Paul now thinks that the loyal readers of the old covenant never understood it entirely, since it (like Moses' face) was veiled. Converting to Christ (“turning to the Lord”),

however, removes the veil. The old covenant was thus inadequate, because it was veiled.

The main thrust is a comparison between the greater and the lesser. The old covenant was genuinely glorious, but it has been surpassed by a long way—so greatly surpassed by a more glorious dispensation that the old has lost its glory, has been “set aside” (NRSV).

I would not call “set aside” incorrect, but the Greek word is an imperfect participle, implying that an action is continuing. One might translate “which was being done away with.” Other suitable translations are “fading” (NIV) and “soon to fade” (NEB).

It is important to note, however, that in addition to saying “once glorious, now fading,” Paul has a harsher description. The old covenant was the ministry or dispensation “of death” (3:7) or of “condemnation” (3:9). Similarly, “the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (3:6).

Paul does not explain how it is that something that condemns and kills can be glorious. He is caught here as elsewhere between two convictions, but here there is no struggle to resolve them; he states them both as facts.³³ The two convictions are that God gave Moses the law and that he sent Christ.

As I explained above, I follow Gregory Tatum is thinking it likely that 2 Corinthians 1–9 was written after Galatians and before 2 Corinthians 10–13.³⁴ It appears that the crises in Corinth and in Galatia overlapped. If we place our present passage after Galatians, it is easy to see that the more negative characterization of the old dispensation in 2 Corinthians was “fathered” by the negative view of the law that he asserted in Galatians, where the role of the law is to “imprison all things under the power of sin” (Gal. 3:22).

33. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, 138.

34. Gregory Tatum, *New Chapters in the Life of Paul: The Relative Chronology of His Career*, Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series 41 (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2006), 59–72. See more fully chap. 17 n. 4.

In summary of the two dispensations in 2 Cor. 3:7-18, the old covenant was given by God, and thus it was glorious. But now it has been surpassed, and surpassed so greatly that, comparatively speaking, it is worthless.

We continue this discussion of the two dispensations by returning to Philippians and a passage closely related to 2 Cor. 3:7-18.

Philippians 3:3-21

After the polemic against those who would require circumcision of Paul’s gentile converts (Phil. 3:2), which seems to come out of the blue, Paul writes about righteousness by faith and being one with Christ in a way that is highly reminiscent of Galatians 2–3, as well as of the passage in 2 Corinthians 3 that we just considered. The entire passage is Philippians 3:3-21, which should be read as a whole. I shall list a few of the parallels between Galatians and Philippians:

Righteousness is by faith in Christ	Gal. 2:16	Phil. 3:9
Righteousness is not by the law	Gal. 2:16, 21; 3:11	Phil. 3:9 (though with a difference)
Paul’s example of himself	Gal. 1:13-14; 2:19	Phil. 3:4b-16
The progression from faith in Jesus Christ to being one person with Jesus Christ	Gal. 2:15-20; 3:22-29	Phil. 3:9-11

We shall return to the parallels below, but first I wish to note a remarkable difference between Galatians and Philippians on the question of “righteousness and the law.” In Galatians, Paul categorically denies that there is such a thing as righteousness by the law (Gal. 2:16; 3:11). “Now it is evident that no one is righteoused before God by the works of the law . . .” (3:11). In Philippians,

however, there *is* such a thing as “righteousness by the law.” In 3:9, Paul writes that he wishes to gain Christ, not by having *a* righteousness based on the law, but through faith. This is not a statement that there can be no righteousness by the law. That there can be *a* righteousness by the law is even clearer in 3:6; Paul had this status: “as to righteousness under the law, blameless” (3:6). But *it doesn’t count*.

Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. (Phil. 3:7)

What *really counts* in this passage is having the particular righteousness that comes by faith in Christ and that leads to “the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death . . .” (Phil. 3:10–11).

That is to say: righteousness by the law, which is possible and is a good thing in and of itself—it was one of Paul’s strong points—does not lead to becoming one person with Christ and thus sharing his resurrection. The shortcoming of the law is that following it can never result in union with Christ, which alone provides salvation.

Although the term “old covenant” does not appear in Phil. 3:3–21, as it did in 2 Cor. 3:7–18, it is nevertheless in Paul’s mind. The sentence “it is we who are the circumcision” (Phil. 3:3) is a claim that Christians, who live under the new dispensation, can claim the blessings of the old. In Phil. 3:4b–6, he is proud of his former status in the dispensation of the law. When he states that according to the law he was blameless (3:6), he regards his achievement as good. All of these advantages however—of ancestry and achievement—are worthless:

Whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. . . . I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of

knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ . . . I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death . . . (Phil. 3:7-10)

This is substantially the same view of the two covenants that we saw in 2 Cor. 3:7-18. The old dispensation was good, but it is worthless in comparison with the new dispensation. Righteousness by the law was good. The “fault” of the law is simply that it did not lead to salvation through faith in Christ and being in Christ, which provides a new form of righteousness.

To generalize, one could say that the fault of Judaism is that it did not lead to salvation through faith in Christ,³⁵ and salvation through Christ is what matters.

Reprise: Righteousness by Faith, Being One Person with Christ, and Paul’s Mysticism

The discussion of the two covenants is inextricably related to Paul’s two soteriological formulations, “righteousness by faith” and “being one person with Christ.” Paul had righteousness by the law, now he has the righteousness that comes through faith in Christ, which involves “sharing his sufferings” and “becoming like him in his death.” In view of the importance of the issue, I shall ruminate on the topic one more time.

It has often been said that Paul thought that righteousness by the law is *bad* because it makes one boastful (if he or she achieves it) or

35. In *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), I wrote, “*In short, this is what Paul finds wrong in Judaism: it is not Christianity*” (552) For reasons that I have never understood, this led some readers to accuse me of saying that “Christianity and Judaism are totally unrelated to each other.” In context, the sentence meant precisely what I have written above: the fault with everything that is not faith in Christ is that it does not lead to membership in the body of Christ.

anxious (that one has not achieved it).³⁶ But Paul was not interested in human psychology. His mind was fixed on what he saw as the great plan of God for humans: that all would be saved by faith in Christ, and anything other than this was *worthless*. How this plan related to the old covenant was still a problem, but he had settled on a main point: the new surpassed the old, which thereby lost its glory.

In our present passage (Phil. 3), the term “righteousness” is important, but this word is clearly inadequate to express the depth of Paul’s christological soteriology—how Christ provides believers with resurrection and eternal life. *That* comes from “knowing Christ,” having faith in him, being one person with him, and sharing his sufferings and death.

As we saw in Galatians, by this time Paul had developed two sets of terminology for a Christian’s saving relationship with God, and he used them both. One was “righteousness by faith,” which is based on the story of Abraham, who was the central figure used in the arguments with the circumcisers in Galatia, probably introduced by them to prove the need of circumcision. But Paul also had what we must consider to be his *own* terminology: becoming one with Christ, sharing his sufferings and his resurrection. Both appear, one after the other, in Philippians 3:9–10: having “a righteousness . . . that comes through faith in Christ. . . . I want to know Christ . . . by becoming like him in his death.”

The terminology is different, but the meaning is not. Though it does not sound like it, having righteousness by faith is the same as sharing the death and resurrection of Christ. The meaning of these conjoined formulations cannot be “a juridical decision that imputes righteousness to humans although they are not in fact righteous.”

36. Rudolf Bultmann: the effort to fulfill the law “*is already sin*.” *Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Scribner, 1951), 1:264; see Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 481–82.

The meaning is borne by the terminology of the mystical participation of the believer in Christ.

The apparently slight revision in Paul's view of the possibility of being righteous by the law—which was doubtless aided by the fact that there was not an acute crisis over circumcision in Philippi—shows that his brain kept working. Philippians shows a small development of his thought about righteousness by law. In Galatians it does not exist, but in Philippians Paul attained it—but it is worthless.

There is no change, however, with regard to the relationship between righteousness by faith and being one with Christ. In both letters his exposition progresses from "faith in Jesus Christ" to "being one person with Jesus Christ": Gal. 2:15–20; 3:22–29; Phil. 3:9–11. It would be an odd argument indeed that begins with the more appropriate terminology and leads to a grand climax of the less appropriate terminology. That is, "being one person with Christ" is the grand conclusion of both Gal. 3:22–29 and Phil. 3:9–11. This must be the formulation that meant the most to Paul.

In light of this passage on being one with Christ, I shall offer a few more words about Paul's mysticism (see also above, pp. 264–66). At the beginning of chapter six of his book *Paul*, Adolf Deissmann wrote this: "We have not merely recognized the secret of Paul's spiritual life but also described it with sacred Pauline formulae when we use the two phrases: Christ in Paul, Paul in Christ."³⁷

In discussing Paul's mysticism, Deissmann did not have in mind the mysticism of the Middle Ages or the Renaissance. Rather, Paul had his own form: "Christ-mysticism."³⁸ Deissmann defined mysticism in general in this way: the word refers to

37. Deissmann, *Paul*, 133.

38. *Ibid.*, 147.

every religious tendency that discovers the way to God direct through inner experience without the mediation of reasoning. The constitutive element in mysticism is immediacy of contact with the deity.³⁹

Several years later, Albert Schweitzer reworked Paul's Christ-mysticism, and his is the most famous book on the topic.⁴⁰ Both of these books are still important and deserve study. But in the end, I do not know more about Paul's mysticism than what he says about it. Christ lives in him; he is in Christ. For him to live is Christ, and faith in Christ leads to suffering with him and to union with him in his death and resurrection.

39. Ibid., 149.

40. Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (1930; New York: H. Holt, 1931).

Romans, Part 1: Introduction; The Universal Human Plight and Its Solution

The major theme of Romans follows from Paul's debate over circumcision, which we saw in Galatians with an echo in Philippians: it is the *equality of Jew and gentile before God*. To do all things in order, however, we must first consider why Paul wrote the letter.

(We discussed Rom. 1:18-32, Paul's attack on gentile idolatry and sexual immorality, in chap. 12 above.)

The Occasion of Romans

The reasons for which Paul wrote are, fortunately, clear. Paul tells us precisely. He was in Corinth for what he intended would be the last time. He had been taking up a collection for the Christians in Jerusalem, and he planned soon to leave Corinth and to take the money, with representatives from his churches, to Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:1-4). In Corinth, money in hand, passage to Jerusalem booked

(Rom. 15:25-27), he wrote to the Christians in Rome to explain his mission and to request their assistance. After delivering the money to the Jerusalem church he planned to continue his mission by moving westward. He wished to visit Rome and then go on to Spain (Rom. 15:23-24, 28-29).

He requested two types of assistance. Having had difficulties with the Jerusalem church and its representatives in Antioch (Gal. 2:1-14), and having been criticized in Corinth by Hebrew “super-apostles,” presumably also from Jerusalem (2 Cor. 11:1-23)—and therefore being somewhat uncertain of his reception there—he requested the Roman church to pray for him:

I appeal to you . . . to join me in earnest prayer to God on my behalf, that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea [non-Christian Jews], and that my ministry to Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints [Christian Jews], so that by God’s will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company. (15:30-31)

In addition to spiritual support through prayer—which I take to be a serious and important request, not a mere formality—he wanted the Romans to “send him on” to Spain; that is, to defray his travel expenses and those of his companions (15:24).

Paul was highly conscious of the fact that the Roman church was not “his” because he had not founded it. This led him to be very tactful:

I remember you always in my prayers, asking that by God’s will I may somehow at last succeed in coming to you. For I am longing to see you so that I may share with you some spiritual gift to strengthen you—or rather so that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine. (1:9-12)

Even so, he could not avoid a certain amount of self-assertion:

I have often intended to come to you . . . in order that I may reap

some harvest among you as I have among the rest of the gentiles. I am a debtor both to Greeks and barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish—hence my eagerness to proclaim the gospel to you also who are in Rome. (1:13–15)

Thus Paul wanted the Romans' prayers and financial support, but he also wanted to have the chance to make some impact on the church there. He begins this effort in the present letter.

When he writes, his difficult struggles with the churches of Corinth and Galatia are still on his mind, and there are passages in Romans in which he returns to the past disputes and reuses some of his arguments. He is most strongly concerned with the issue of Galatians: the status of gentiles in the people of the God of Israel. Consequently he is still thinking about the difficult issue of the role of the Jewish law in the divine economy. The Jewish law is part of the problem of "two dispensations," which he wrote about in 2 Cor. 3:7–18 and Phil. 3:3–21 (see the previous chapter), and which he continues to ponder. The disputes with the Corinthians do not have the same grip on his mind, but he does return to them occasionally.

Paul's Mission as Depicted in Romans

In chap. 3 (pp. 102–11), we discussed in some detail Paul's conception of his mission. I think that it will be useful to put a paragraph on the topic here as a reminder.

In 1 Cor. 9:20–21, Paul had written, "to the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews . . . To those outside the law I became as one outside the law . . . so that I might win those outside the law." In Galatians, however, he is "apostle to the gentiles," just as Peter is "apostle to the circumcised." In Romans he says nothing of a mission to Jews, but only to gentiles. In the opening lines of the letter he writes that he received "grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles" (1:5–6). A few

lines later he desires to “reap some harvest” among both categories of gentile: Greeks (that is, Greek-speakers) and those who did not speak Greek and were therefore “barbarians” (1:13). This emphasis on the exclusively gentile orientation of his mission becomes more elaborate in Romans 15: “. . . because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable . . .” (15:16). And even more emphatically: “For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to win obedience from the Gentiles . . .” (15:18). Earlier in the letter he had written this: “Inasmuch then as I am apostle to the Gentiles, I glorify my ministry in order to make my own people jealous, and thus save some of them” (11:13-14).¹ Here his role in the salvation of Jews is indirect, a role that, in effect, denies that he had been apostle to Jews. (See above, pp. 448-49.)

Paul's Preface to the Letter

In Rom. 1:1-6 Paul introduces himself as “an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God.” In this introduction he states (as we have already seen) that his apostleship was to the gentiles (1:5). But what he says about the main subject of the gospel, Jesus Christ (1:1), requires examination. The gospel concerns God's Son, “who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from

1. “Apostle to gentiles”: Greek does not use an indefinite article (“a” or “an” in English), and whether or not to insert one here, so that Paul is “*an* apostle to gentiles,” is a matter of judgment. The NRSV has an “an”; in agreement with this the NEB translates “*a* missionary to the Gentiles.” The NIV, however, inserts the definite article: “*the* apostle to the Gentiles” (so also Luther). The JB is even more emphatic: “I have been sent to the pagans as their apostle.” I vote with Luther, the NIV, and the JB on this point. Although Paul was not in fact the only apostle working among gentiles (consider the super-apostles in Corinth and the fact that someone else founded the church in Rome), he considered himself to be the only apostle to whom God had directly given this mission.

the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1:4). In terms of later theology, this description of Jesus’ sonship would be called “adoptionism”: Jesus was not born God’s Son, but became Son of God by the resurrection.

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke contain well-known stories in which Jesus was born of a virgin, who was impregnated by the Holy Spirit, and had thus been born the Son of God. Paul’s description of Jesus’ sonship reminds us that we do not know how early traditions related to the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke began to appear. We cannot date Matthew and Luke precisely, and it is impossible to date the various traditions that they contain. I believe, however, that Paul’s letter to Rome was at least a few decades earlier than the earliest Gospel or proto-gospel. He may not have known the story of the Holy Spirit and Mary’s virginity.

The sonship of Jesus in the Gospels is too large and difficult a subject to include in a work on Paul, but I did want to call attention to the important issues that Rom. 1:1–4 raises: there was wide, probably universal, agreement among Christians that Jesus was God’s Son, but there were also different views about the sense in which Jesus was “Son of God.” In discussing Galatians 3, we saw that Paul also applied the term “sons of God” to those who were one person with Christ, and here we see the possibility that he was Son by adoption. Christians debated Jesus’ humanity, divinity, and sonship for centuries.

The Main Theme of the Letter

The definition of Paul’s mission in Rom. 1:5—to convert gentiles—leads us to the *leitmotif* of Romans: the equality of Jew and gentile. There are so many *topics* in Romans, as Paul rethinks the controversies with the Galatians and Corinthians and looks forward to his future mission in the West, that perhaps it is an error to look for

a main theme, but I have decided that this is a worthwhile exercise. I shall list some passages that relate to the equality of Jew and gentile:

1. Rom. 2:9-10: tribulation for evildoers, “the Jew first and also the Greek,” but glory and honor for those who do good, “the Jew first and also the Greek.”
2. Rom. 2:28-29: “For a person is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical. Rather a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart.”
3. Rom. 3:9: “All, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin.”
4. Rom. 3:22: “There is no distinction.”
5. Rom. 3:29: “Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also?”
6. Rom. 4:11-12: “Abraham is “the ancestor of all who faith without being circumcised . . . and likewise the ancestor of the circumcised who . . . follow the example of the faith. . . .”
7. Rom. 9:24: “. . . including us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles.”
8. Rom. 10:4: “For Christ is the end of the law, so that there may be righteousness for everyone who faiths.”
9. Rom. 10:12-13: “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek. . . . For, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’”
10. Rom. 11:32: “For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.”

Obviously there are some chapters in which there are no references to the equality of Jew and gentile, and this “main” theme does not determine the entire contents of the letter. But if we add to the ten passages just above the fact that Paul identifies himself with the

mission to the gentiles, we add chapter 15 as containing references to “the gentile issue.” Paul here as earlier (Galatians and Philippians) holds that the circumcised do not have exclusive rights to the mercy of God.

There is no other theme that ties several parts of the letter together the way the gentile question does. The first four chapters of Romans are concerned with Jews and gentiles, circumcision, and righteousness, which shows that it was the conflict with the Galatians over circumcision that was most pressing—even though he wrote the letter from Corinth, where there had been problems enough, though of a different sort.²

We shall see that in the first eight chapters Paul presents the human plight (lack of salvation) in various ways, followed by a description of a solution to the plight. These are not of course really different predicaments and solutions, but rather different formulations. The general argument of much of Romans (chaps. 1–7) is (1) that everyone—Jew and Greek alike—is equally condemned and in need of salvation; (2) that all are saved on the same basis, faith in Christ.

Some years ago I wrote that Paul’s thought ran “backward,” from solution to plight, rather than from plight to solution.³ I think that the reason that Paul is so confident that every human being is in need of salvation is that he believed that God had sent Christ to save the entire universe on the sole condition of faith in him. The monolithic nature of the solution—God’s great plan—required that there be a single problem. And the problem was Sin, which none escaped. In Romans, “sin” is sometimes a transgression, but at other times it is a power that opposes the power of God. I shall capitalize “sin” in those cases where it is most obviously a hostile power.

2. It is often thought that “the righteousness of God” is the main theme. This is an important issue, which appears in 1:17; 3:5–26; and chap. 11.

3. E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 442–47.

In Romans, however, he wants to show how the common solution (Christ) is effective even though the lost state is described in different ways. Thus his thought moved from solution to plight, but his letter to the Romans runs from plight to solution.

Romans 1–3: Plight and Solution, Round One: Human Disobedience and Righteousness by Faith

In chapters 1–3, sin is defined in the common way: disobedience and bad actions. “He will render to every man according to his works” (2:6); “tribulation and distress for everyone who does evil”: “glory and honor for everyone who does good” (2:10); “For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be righteous [justified]” (2:13). In chapter 2, it seems theoretically possible that a gentile who followed the law of nature, written on the heart, might be found innocent at the judgment (2:14–16).

But getting into the details of how well people obey the revealed law or the law written on the heart (2:15), and whether or not a perfectly upright person could be saved, does not suit Paul’s main purpose very well, which was to establish the fact that everyone was condemned without Christ. He finally puts an end to going back and forth over obeying the law or not and being circumcised or not and offers a dogmatic conclusion: “I have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under [the power of] Sin,⁴ as it is written, ‘There is no one who is righteous, not even one’” (Rom. 3:9–11, quoting Ps. 14, parts of vv. 1 and 3).

In Rom. 3:10–18, Paul gives a catena of verses from his Scripture to prove how bad people are. I quote only one example from this section: “Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery are in

4. The Greek text lacks the words “the power of,” though this may be implied by “under.”

their paths” (Rom. 3:15-16, based on Isa. 59:7-8). Then he offers another major proof text: “For ‘no human being will be righteoused in his sight’ by works of the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin” (3:20, quoting Ps. 143:2). The conclusion of the argument so far is that “there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are now righteoused by his grace as a gift . . .” (3:22-24).

Thus he uses his favorite argumentative weapon, quotation of the Greek translation of Hebrew Scripture, to formulate a dogma that gets him out of the difficulty into which he ventured when he wrote that God would grant eternal life to people whose behavior was good enough (2:7).

It is quite striking that in this section we find these two statements: “it is doers of the law who will be righteoused” (2:13) and “no human being will be righteoused in his sight” (3:20). We saw in Philippians that Paul wrote that he himself had been blameless with regard to righteousness under the law, but that this was a worthless accomplishment, since the resurrection depends entirely on being one person with Christ (Phil. 3:3-11). I wish that he had repeated this argument early in Romans, but he does not. We have to wait until chapter 10. In our present passage (chaps. 2-3), after stating the possibility of righteousness by the law, he says, in effect, that this never happens. It is actually impossible, which he establishes not by analyzing human behavior in detail but rather by quoting proof texts that state that no one is righteous and that humans are very sinful.

To save the great apostle from contradiction, I suppose that we could say that in Rom. 2:6-16 he considers a theoretical possibility before dismissing it. At any rate, he manages to conclude that there is a monolithic, universal problem: all humans sin and therefore are under Sin (which we may consider as the opposite to being “in Christ”). To this problem there is a universal solution: God sent

Christ to save the entire world by faith in him: “the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ” (3:22); “the redemption that is in Christ Jesus . . . through faith in his blood” (3:24–25).

God’s Righteousness

The equality of Jew and gentile leads Paul to question whether or not God is “righteous,” that is, “just” or “fair.” He gave Israel the law, and yet the people whose lives were governed by the law were, in the end, the same as gentiles who did not have the law: all were equally condemned for their sins (3:9; 3:20, quoted above). Is this fair? Paul replies to this implied question by saying that now there has been a new revelation of God’s uprightness: “the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who faith.” In theory, this means that all those who sinned are “now righteoused by his grace as a gift.” This proves that God “himself is righteous and that he righteouses the one who has faith in Jesus” (3:21–26). He intends that this new dispensation should be universal, and his own activity contributes toward its universality. The practical issue, that spreading the new dispensation is going to take a long time, though the Lord will soon return, does not interfere with his confidence that all can be saved by faith in Christ.

He will, however, think about this, and in chapter 11 he will pose the problem (there will not be time for everyone to turn to Christ) and its solution. In discussing that chapter we shall consider the issue of “theodicy,” the “righteousness of God,” more fully.

Throughout Romans 1–3, the problem that is corrected only by faith in Christ is *human behavior*: whether people are obedient to the law or not—either the law of God or the law “written on the heart.” On the whole, these chapters do not rest on the theory that humans are imprisoned by Sin and that they cannot help themselves. We saw that in Galatians 3 and it will recur in Romans, but thus far in Romans

one supposes that transgression is universal but nevertheless optional for each individual person.

Since the problem is human unrighteousness, the solution (that Christ came to save the world) is formulated as “righteousness by faith in Christ.” (Below, when the definition of the universal problem changes, the terminology of the solution will change.)

In chapters 1–3, the phrase “righteousness by faith” (using the noun “righteousness” or the adjective “righteous”) occurs in 1:17 and 3:22, 26. Paul uses the verb “to righteous” or “to be righteous” in 3:28, 30. A longer statement of God’s solution to human sin is this: people are “righteoused as a gift by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith” (3:24–25).⁵

In negative statements (no one is righteous) Paul uses the adjective in 3:10, 26; the passive verb in 3:20. In the statement “doers of the law will be righteous” (2:13) he uses the passive verb.

Repentance and Forgiveness

It is at first surprising that in this long discussion of *human transgression* Paul does not give repentance and forgiveness a large role. In the Hebrew Bible, later Jewish literature, many books of the New Testament (though not all), and later Christianity, the *sovereign* cure for sin—that is, for transgression against God’s will—is repentance and the acceptance of God’s forgiveness. When Paul writes, “Do you despise the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience?” (2:3), followed by “Do you not realize that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?” (2:4), one expects an ardent appeal to repent

5. The translation of Rom. 3:25 is difficult, partly because of a rare word (*hilastērion*), which is usually translated “atonement,” partly because the syntax is not clear. The phrase that I translated “by his blood effective through faith” is literally “through faith in his blood.” The general intention is clear: God’s grace, the death of Jesus, and faith provide redemption.

and be forgiven. But he then simply rebukes transgressors for having “hard and impenitent” hearts (2:5).

Romans 2:4–5 show that Paul knew perfectly well the standard formula of sin, repentance, and forgiveness, but that is not the emphasis of chapters 1–3. He wants to drive home his conviction that salvation comes only by faith in Christ (3:22–26). If plain, ordinary, old fashioned repentance, coupled with a plea for God’s forgiveness, would solve human wickedness, God need not have sent his Son. Thus Paul’s downplaying of repentance, the usual cure for transgression, is determined by his prior conviction that salvation is provided only by Christ.

Put another way, everyone, including even Paul himself, who was blameless in the sight of the law, must convert to Christianity by putting their faith in Christ, and this is the point of Romans 1–3.

Forgiveness and repentance play such a huge role in Judaism and Christianity that I wish to explain Paul’s use of these ideas a little more fully. The verb “repent” and the noun “repentance” (*metanoia* and the cognate verb) appear in Paul’s extant correspondence only in Rom. 2:4 (which we have just quoted), 2 Cor. 7:9, 10, and 2 Cor. 12:21. Similarly, the usual word for “forgive” (*aphiēmi*) appears only in a quotation from the Septuagint in Rom. 4:7. The verb *charizomai* is used to mean “forgive” in 2 Cor. 2:7, 10. The full scheme of sin–repentance–forgiveness appears only in two passages in 2 Corinthians.

Second Corinthians 2:7–10 and 12:21 both deal with a sinner in the Corinthian congregation who had the support of many Corinthians. Presumably this sinner was the man who was having sex with his stepmother (1 Cor. 5:1–5). In this case, repentance and forgiveness have their usual application. From this we see that in Paul’s letters repentance and forgiveness operate *within the Christian community*, among people who have already converted and have put their faith in

Christ. But for people who had not converted, mere repentance was not enough to reconcile them to God. They needed to convert.

Romans 4: Abraham Revisited; Righteousness by Faith Further Explained and Argued For

In Galatians 3:17, Paul stated that the law came 430 years after Abraham was righteous by faith and that the later law, requiring circumcision, did not alter the covenant with Abraham. This bit of his argument contained an error, which he doubtless realized as he thought the entire matter over again and ran the passages through his mind. While it is true that in the biblical story Moses receives the law a long time after the days of Abraham, nevertheless God gave Abraham a *specific* law: namely, that he and his male descendants must be circumcised. And the law carried the threat: “Any uncircumcised male . . . shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant” (Gen. 17:9-14). Paul had to drop his original argument that righteousness by faith was centuries earlier than the requirement of circumcision.

But he was resourceful in argument. If one line of argumentation had weaknesses, he would shore it up and also offer others. In the present case, when revising his argument for the Romans, he points out (in effect) that Abraham was declared righteous by faith in Gen. 15:6, *two chapters* before he received the law of circumcision in Genesis 17 (Rom. 4:11). Thus despite his earlier error, Paul can still claim chronological priority for righteousness by faith.

In chapter 4, Paul continues to revamp his argument. He now grants that Abraham was circumcised, but (1) this was merely the “seal” of his righteousness and faith (4:11) and (2) since he was righteous by faith both before and after circumcision, he is “the ancestor of all who faith without being circumcised . . . and likewise the ancestor of the circumcised . . . who also follow the example of

the faith that our ancestor Abraham had before he was circumcised” (4:12).

This is another argument for the equality of the uncircumcised gentiles: they can be righteous by faith just as Abraham was before he was circumcised.

In Galatians, Paul did not use, and probably had not thought of, the argument that Gen. 15:6 shows that, like their “ancestor” Abraham, gentiles could be righteous by faith without circumcision, but he made them “descendants of Abraham” by a more complicated exegetical argument: Christ was Abraham’s singular offspring, and gentile converts who had faith were one person with Christ; therefore they were Abraham’s offspring (Gal. 3:16, 28–29).

The conclusion of both Galatians 3 and Romans 4 is that gentiles who have faith in Christ are heirs of the promises given to Abraham. It is the *conclusion* that is important to Paul. He could argue for it first one way, then another.

In Romans 4, Paul emphasizes two words that came to determine much of Protestant theology: “reckoned” (4:9) and “boasting” (4:2; also 3:27). “Reckoned” led to the idea of fictional or “imputed” righteousness, given as a juridical decision to people who are in fact sinners. The fact that faith excludes “boasting” proves that trying to be righteous is the worst thing that anyone can do, because it leads to boasting. Although in my judgment these two points fail as two of the central and most important motifs in Paul’s theology, it is certainly true that they are emphasized in Romans 4.

I shall say a bit more about *boasting* and *reckoning*. The logic is simply this: if righteousness can be achieved by human effort—works—humans can boast, which is bad, because it indicates that human accomplishment is at least as good as God’s grace. But if righteousness is “reckoned” to people on the basis of faith, no one can boast. The theme first appears in Rom. 2:17, 23: “If you call yourself

a Jew and rely on the law and boast of your relation to God . . . You that boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law?" This shows, to start with, that underlying the discussion of boasting is the question of native Jewish superiority over gentiles—which Paul opposes.

Next we read that, since God righteouses the one who has faith in Jesus, boasting "is excluded" (3:26-27). Paul then passes on to Abraham and reckoning: "For if Abraham was righteoused by works, he has something to boast about. . . . 'Abraham faithed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.' Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due."

Paul's strictures on human boasting are good and worthwhile points, but they are just that: *points* along the way to a *conclusion*, which appears in 4:9, where he restates his major theme: "Is this blessedness, then, pronounced only on the circumcised, *or also on the uncircumcised?*" (4:9) The answer, of course, is that, since Abraham was blessed before he was circumcised, so it still is: uncircumcised gentiles can be blessed as was Abraham (4:9-12). The promise of righteousness by faith is still valid (4:23-25).

"Works of the Law" in Romans 1-4

Because of the prominence in these chapters of the phrase "works of the law," frequently abbreviated to "works," or replaced simply by "the law," we should pay some heed to the terminology. I shall give the incidence for chapters 1-4:

- "Works of law": 3:20, 28
- "Works": 2:6; 4:2, 6
- "The law": 2:12, 13, 14, 15 ("work of the law"), 17, 18 ("instructed in the law"), 20, 23, 25, 26, 27; 3:19, 20, 21, 27, 31; 4:13, 14, 15, 16

The identity of the law in question is unmistakable: it is the Jewish law (except for the two instances in which Paul mentions the law given by nature [2:14] or written on the heart [2:15]). Otherwise “the law” is the law given by God (according to Hebrew Scripture), especially the law that requires circumcision, the law in which Jews might boast. Therefore “works of the law” are those forms of behavior that are required in the Hebrew law. “Works” in these occurrences are simply abbreviations of “works of the law.”

These verses against reliance on “works of the law” are often converted into reliance on “good works” or “good deeds,” the sorts of things for which Boy Scouts and others are applauded. And then it is thought that Paul was against “good deeds.”

Nothing could be a worse perversion of what Paul wrote. As we have seen several times, he was 100 percent in favor of good deeds and urged people to do more and more (1 Thess. 4:10). Doing good deeds, however, is thousands of miles away from the subject of this section of Paul’s letters. Here the topic is the place of *gentiles in the people of God in the last days*. Paul was especially concerned that gentile converts not be forced into becoming Jews in order to be Christian. The gentiles are the equals of the Jews—except on the point of chronological order: “to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom. 2:9-10). Or, put another way, they were all equally sinners (3:9).

As we saw in Galatians, the principal “deed” or “work” that was in debate was circumcision, which for males born into the people of Israel was the mark of the covenant, while for males who converted to Judaism it was the entry rite. It was this that the circumcision party was trying to force on Paul’s gentile converts. The “work of the law” par excellence was removing the foreskin of male penises—not at all like donating money to the Red Cross and visiting the sick.

The works of the law, in other words, were biblical

commandments, but Paul's negative references to "works of law" do not have in mind such laws as the Ten Commandments and the love commandment, *which he always favors*. The "works of law" that he opposes are those commandments that were essential to being Jewish and that distinguished Jews from gentiles. Circumcision, food laws, and "days" (the Sabbath and other holy days in the Jewish calendar) are the specific topics that come up in Romans, Galatians, and Philippians.

Thus we see that Paul's opposition to "works of law" had nothing to do with, for example, obeying the commandment to honor father and mother. Opposing "works of law" such as circumcision is simply a way of asserting the right to bring gentiles into the people of God in the last days without requiring that they also convert to Judaism. Abraham was righteous before he was circumcised, and Christians can be righteous without circumcision. All that is required is faith in Christ. Instead of writing "no one can be righteous by works of law," he could have said, "no one can be righteous by being or becoming Jewish."

Romans 5: Plight and Solution, Round Two: Adam's Sin and Christ's Death

It is possible that Paul thought that his argument in chapters 1–3 for universal sinfulness was not entirely convincing, but it is more likely that his fertile mind simply offered other ways of talking about sin and redemption in addition to transgression and faith in Christ. In any case, after revising the argument from Abraham he returns to the same general theme as in chapters 1–3: the monolithic, universal plight that requires a monolithic, universal solution.

The theme is succinctly stated in 5:15. "For if the many died through one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift of grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded

for the many.” (“Many” in this sentence means “all.”) In this chapter, universal sin is blamed on Adam. The name “Adam” occurs only in 5:14, but he is in mind throughout. Thus 5:12: “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned. . . .” Paul did not finish this sentence, which should have continued by stating that all are saved by Christ. Instead, after comments on sin and death he resumed the argument of 5:12 in a new sentence, 5:15, quoted above (“If the many died. . .”).

Paul had to struggle to pin universal sin on Adam; it is by no means self-evident. “Death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam” (5:14). Why did Adam’s sin cause everyone else to sin? Paul cannot say, but he does repeat it: “If, because of the one man’s trespass, death exercised dominion through that one . . .” (5:17).

I shall not try to reason out just how Adam’s sin led to universal sin. Where Paul failed, I can hardly succeed. Thus I turn from the plight (because of Adam everyone is sinful) to Paul’s solution: “Christ died for the ungodly” (5:6); “God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us” (5:8); “if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son . . .” (5:10); “therefore just as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to righteousness and life for all” (5:18).

“Righteousness” for humans is one of the main results of Christ’s death (*dikaïosynē* in 5:17, 21; *dikaïōma* in 5:16, 18; the passive verb in 5:9), but the precise formula “righteousness by faith” appears only in 5:1 (literally, “since we are righteoused by faith”). This is another of those little oddities. After 5:1 the noun “faith” (*pistis*) does not occur again until chapter 9. The verb “to faith” (*pisteuō*) does not occur

in chapter 5; it appears once in chapter 6 and does not recur until chapter 9.

This terminological oddity is merely that. Paul did not stop believing in “righteousness by faith.” He varied his terminology and emphasized the efficacy of the death of Christ.

Romans 6: Plight and Solution, Round Three: Slavery to Sin and Dying with Christ

In Rom. 3:9, Paul wrote that all are *under* sin, reasonably translated by the NRSV as “under the power of sin.” As we saw above, however, apart from that phrase, in chapters 1–4 “sin” is a human action, not an inimical *force* or *personification* that wields power (that is, an abstraction that has the qualities of a living being). But whether or not Rom. 3:9 implies a personified or semi-personified power, that idea was not far away. It first appears in our present chapter in 6:6 so that “we might no longer be enslaved to Sin.” (I capitalize the word here to indicate the personification implied by Paul’s metaphor). Following this, the same idea recurs: “Sin will have no dominion over you” (6:14); “having once been slaves of Sin” (6:17); “when you were slaves of Sin” (6:20).

The personification would be perfectly clear if we simply called Sin “Satan”: “Slaves of Satan,” “under the power of Satan,” and so on. Sin becomes a power that can actually compete with God for control of his creation. Sin’s power is so great that people have to die to escape it.

When the human plight is posed as bondage to Sin, the solution is formulated as dying with Christ: “For whoever has died is freed from Sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him” (6:7–8); “Sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace” (6:14); “when you were slaves of Sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. . . . But now that you

have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life” (6:20, 22). The first instance of the theme, dying with Christ, is the fullest:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. (6:3-4)

Despite this assurance that Christians have escaped the power of Sin by dying with Christ, Paul adds exhortations not to yield to Sin, but rather to righteousness: “do not let Sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies to make you obey their passions”; “no longer present your members to Sin . . . but present yourselves to God” (6:12-14).

The word translated “passions” by the NRSV (*epithymiai*) is better translated “desires” (as the NIV). In 1 Thess. 4:4, Paul uses this word in connection with the word *passion* (*pathos*): “the passion of desire.” This is a reminder that Paul shared to a degree the view that was widespread in Greek philosophy, and enthusiastically embraced by Philo, that passion and desire were evil. One may wish to look again at the discussion in the chapter on 1 Thessalonians (pp. 219-20).

“Dying with Christ” as the solution to the plight of bondage under Sin obviously relies on the theme of being one person with Christ, which is so important in Galatians 3 and Philippians 3. Romans 6:3-4 adds baptism as either the *means* of this mystical death with Christ or as representing it.

In ancient religions, rituals were frequently regarded as efficacious in and of themselves, not requiring the spiritual or mental intention either of the person who performs the ritual or of the person who participates in it. In Egypt, the “Opening of the Mouth Ceremony” was performed not only on corpses but also on mummies and statues, which obviously could not participate consciously in the ritual. It

worked on its own.⁶ For this the Romans had the phrase *ex opere operato*, “it works by the work.”

Similarly, the sacrifices prescribed in Leviticus do not say anything about the mental or spiritual state of the person who brings the sacrifice. Rather, “You should lay your hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be acceptable in your behalf as atonement for you. The bull shall be slaughtered before the Lord . . .” (Lev. 1:4 and following). There is not a word about the interior or mental state of the worshippers.

It is not surprising, then, that some scholars have understood Paul’s baptism (6:3–4) as a ritual that was efficacious in and of itself. Perhaps the most famous exponent of this view was Albert Schweitzer.

The idea that it is only through a believing self-surrender to absorption in Christ that the Elect can bring about the mystical fellowship with Him is quite outside of Paul’s horizon. He assumes as self-evident that a grafting into Christ takes place in Baptism and is bound up with this ceremonial act.⁷

Schweitzer had one strong piece of supporting evidence in the New Testament: 1 Cor. 15:29, where Paul does not challenge the Corinthian practice of baptism on behalf of the dead. I assume that Paul did not start the practice—or we would hear about it in other letters—but merely allowed the Corinthians to follow it. It was harmless, and he had a lot of other issues in Corinth. In any case, baptism on behalf of the dead is very much like the Egyptian rituals

6. “The Opening of the Mouth ceremony is arguably the most important ancient Egyptian ritual. It was performed on cult statues of gods, kings, and private individuals, as well as on the mummies of humans and Apis bulls; it could even be performed on entire temples. The effect of the ritual was to animate its recipient, or, in the case of the dead, to reanimate it. It allowed the mummy, statue, or temple to eat, breathe, see, hear, and otherwise enjoy the provisions offered by the cult.” *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Donald B. Redford (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 2:605.

7. Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (1930; New York: H. Holt, 1931), 19.

performed on mummies. Does this carry the day for Schweitzer's view?

On the other side of the question, we note that Jews of Paul's day *did* believe in spiritual and mental preparation before sacrificing—whether it is in Leviticus or not. Or, to speak more judiciously, we know that thoughtful Jews believed in spiritual preparation. According to Philo, when a person brings an offering to atone for harming or damaging someone else he is “convicted inwardly by his conscience,” “makes a plain confession,” “asks for pardon,” “repays his [victim],” and “adds a fifth”;⁸ and then seeks God's forgiveness by the sacrifice of a ram (*Spec. Laws* 1.234–38).⁹ The true advocate for forgiveness, he wrote, is “soul-felt conviction” on the part of the worshipper (*Spec. Laws* 1.235–37).¹⁰ Similarly, the seven days of purification before sacrificing, during which the worshipper was sprinkled with a mixture of water and the ashes of the Red Heifer, “induced thoughtfulness.”¹¹ The rite reminded the worshippers who they were, whence they came, and to whom they owed their existence (*Spec. Laws* 1.263–66). If we turned from Philo to rabbinic literature, we would find a vast quantity of material on the importance of “intention,” which is essential in many cases and overrides the actual act in others.¹²

I do not know about pagans, but I am confident of the correctness of my opinion that thoughtful Jews who took part in religious rituals believed in spiritual and mental preparation before they took part in the sacred rites. And these people were often teachers in synagogues.

8. For the law of the Added Fifth—a fine of 20 percent of the damage—see Num. 5:5–7.

9. E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief* (London: SCM, 1992), 108–9.

10. *Ibid.*, 253.

11. For procuring the ashes of the Red Heifer, see Num. 19:1–10; on the sprinkling to remove corpse impurity (required before entering the temple), see Num. 19:17–20.

12. For a general treatment, see Sanders, *Practice and Belief*, 235–37, 251–57. On “intention,” see further Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), subject index s.v. “Intention.”

I believe that there were virtually no Jews in Paul's world who did not know that inner purification should accompany purification of the body, or that only those who have "clean hands *and* a pure heart" should "ascend the hill of the Lord" and "stand in his holy place" (Ps. 24:3-4). This is not in Leviticus, but it is in the Bible.

Schweitzer, a genius in music, a self-sacrificing and dedicated doctor, and one of the most penetrating interpreters of the New Testament, being human, had a weakness. In his fabulous early life, as he mastered three fields, he studied Judaism very little. His thought about it seems to depend mostly on *4 Ezra* and other apocalyptic literature. If he could have found time to read Philo and the rabbis, he would have seen a lot more in Judaism than he thought was there.

Because of Paul's background, attending synagogues in the Diaspora (even if not studying Hebrew in Jerusalem), I oppose Schweitzer on this point. I think that what was "self-evident" to Paul was not that the ritual act of baptism was effective in and of itself, but that all rituals required spiritual and mental preparation and commitment.

In the passages from Romans 6 that we quoted above, two further terms require special consideration. One is the by now (I hope) famous passive form of the verb "to righteous," usually translated "to be justified," *dedikaiōtai*, which appears in Rom. 6:7. In the sentence that, following the NRSV and the NIV, we translated "For whoever has died is freed from Sin," the word translated "freed" is *dedikaiōtai*. The verse says, literally, "is righteoused from Sin." This odd use of "righteoused" gives translators a hard time, and the NIV and NRSV chose the familiar term "freed." The NEB creatively has "since a dead man is no longer answerable for his sin." The JB offers, "he has finished with sin." Long ago Tyndale translated literally, "is justified from sin," and Luther, "*ist gerechtfertigt und frei von der Sünde*" ("is righteoused and free from sin").

The points that are most in favor of understanding the passage to mean “freed from Sin” are these: (1) the verse immediately follows “enslaved to Sin,” and “freed” is the obvious antithesis to “enslaved”; (2) a few verses later we find a parallel: “you have been set free from Sin,” where “freed” is the literal translation of the verb (6:18), and the same words are repeated in 6:22.

There is no dispute about the general meaning of Rom. 6:7: those who die in Christ are no longer under the dominion of Sin. Still, the use of the verb “righteoused” in this context requires an explanation.

In *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, I proposed that this odd use of “righteoused” or “justified” arose from the fact that Paul uses this verb as a “transfer term.”¹³ It indicates the change from one status or condition to another. Not only is it, in this sentence, the equivalent of “set free,” it could also be paralleled by “sanctified” (1 Cor. 1:2) and “reconciled” (Rom. 5:10). By Christ, one is “righteoused,” “freed,” “sanctified,” or “reconciled” more or less indifferently: these do not mean different things but are different formulations of the same idea. People who are in Christ are *transferred, changed from one condition or status to another*. We shall return to “transfer terminology” in the final chapter of this book.

The second term to be noted is the unexpected appearance of “law,” *nomos*, in 6:14: “for Sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.” The law is positively connected to life under the dominion of Sin. This is not a total shock because of Gal. 4:4–5, where Paul writes that people under the law need redemption. The law is part of the old dispensation, and Christ came to move people into the new dispensation. “Law” in this verse also prepares the way for Romans 7, the most difficult chapter in the Pauline canon. There is some preparation for 6:14 earlier in

13. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 472 and n. 57, 503, 506, 545.

Romans: through the law comes the knowledge of sin (3:20); sin is not reckoned where there is no law (5:13); law came in with the result that the trespass (of Adam) multiplied (5:20).

Thus far Paul has used three sets of terminology and conceptions to contrast the sorry state of people who are not in Christ with that of people who are. (1) All people have transgressed and stand condemned; they need *faith in Christ to give them righteousness*. (2) All people are implicated in the sin of Adam and can be saved only through the *death of Christ*. (3) All people are slaves of Sin and are freed—transferred to a new condition—only by *dying with Christ*. We should not be confused by the mere changes in terminology. “Faith in Christ” and “dying with Christ” certainly *sound* different. One refers to spiritual and mental orientation, the other to a mystical union. Paul *meant* them both. In function they are the same: they provide sinners with salvation. Despite the difference of conception between mental orientation and mystical union, I believe that it is fair to say that they are the same. We recall from Phil. 3:9–10 that the “righteousness that comes from God based on faith” means knowing Christ and “sharing his sufferings by becoming like him in his death.”

The conception of sin also changes. Sin in Romans 1–3 is transgression (except in 3:9); in Romans 6, it is a power that enslaves. We noted just above that in Romans 1–3 Paul did not use the expected cure for transgression—repentance and forgiveness. By the time we reach chapter 6, where Sin is an enslaving power, we see that repentance and forgiveness are not sufficient. Regretting that one is enslaved does not break the power of Sin once it becomes personified. People need a savior who can overcome the power of Sin, not simply their own contrition. Only “dying with Christ” breaks the bonds of enslavement. I suspect that when writing Romans 1–3 Paul had already thought of the human plight as being bondage, not merely

transgression, and for that reason did not prescribe repentance and forgiveness as the sovereign cure for sin in Romans 1–3.

Despite the change of Paul's conception of Sin from Romans 3 to Romans 6 (from human transgression to a personified power), the plight and solution in Romans 6 are very much like the plight and solution of Romans 1–3. Everyone is in sin or is enslaved to Sin, and only turning to Christ provides a way out.

Romans 7: The Chapter on the Law

The Underlying Issue

The following verses are so difficult that I wish to offer in advance a general explanation of “what is going on in Paul's brain.” We shall then look at each of the sections of Romans 7 and conclude with a summary.

The general explanation is that in chapter 7 Paul again faces the problem of two divine dispensations, which we discussed in the chapter on Philippians. Paul was convinced by a revelation that God sent Jesus Christ to save everyone on the basis of the sole requirement of faith in him. Therefore nothing else could provide salvation. This means that the “prior dispensation”—the election of Israel and the giving of the law—did not save people. Everyone, both Jew and gentile, needed to be saved by Christ. Paul believed, however, that God had given the old dispensation: he had chosen Israel and given them the law. Paul could not say, with Marcion, that the old dispensation God was an evil god. He thought that the same God gave both “systems”: election/law and faith in Christ.

He worried about whether or not God, in giving two plans, had played fair, as we saw in Romans 2 and shall see again when we discuss chapters 9–11. Right now we note that he had a problem reconciling the two divine dispensations. He wrote about the law

much more than about election since the law continued to operate in the daily life of Jews. They inherited the election but had to follow the law.

We saw above that Paul could sometimes content himself merely by saying that the new order was “more glorious” than the old (2 Cor. 3). But he had a black-and-white mentality, and this mild contrast between the two would not always satisfy him. He went further: the old dispensation was “being done away with” (see p. 608); what was not faith in Christ was useless, worth *nothing* (Phil. 3:7–8). From there he could push what was useless for salvation further and further toward being a positive *evil*. That is what is “going on” in his discussion of the law in Romans 7. It moves by stages from regarding the Jewish law as “ineffective to save” to being “one of the enslaving evil powers that is opposed to Christ.”

Then, of course, since God gave the law, Paul will have to retract or modify that view. This means that his statements about the law will not cohere perfectly with each other. He pushes it one way (it is the ally of Sin) and then he pulls it back the other (it is holy and good). Each of his arguments makes sense. Paul was not irrational. But if you put all of his statements about the law together they do not make a systematic theology of the law. Scholars have searched for the common ground on which they can reconstruct Paul’s theology of the law (on the assumption that he was intent on having a complete systematic theology). But they have searched in vain, and without agreeing with each other, because what he is actually doing is *wrestling* with a difficult problem.

Paul was not alone in being unable perfectly to reconcile the exclusive election of Israel and the giving of the divine law with universal salvation based on faith in Christ. It cannot be done. Of course one can say that God erred or that God changed his mind, but

if one puts the two systems side by side they are seen to disagree. That constituted an enormous and in fact unsolvable problem.

The problem was seen as enormous in the second century, which led to radical solutions such as Marcion's (above, pp. 454-55). Eventually Christians stopped fretting about it and settled into a compromise. They would *say* that the "Old Testament" was the Word of God and that the law should be obeyed. They kept a lot of the stories of the Old Testament, such as Adam and Eve and Noah, but they reduced the law to the Ten Commandments, and thus left out the vast majority of the laws in the Bible (including circumcision and the food laws). Then they changed or ignored some of the Commandments that they accepted in theory. For many centuries, Christians said that they kept the Sabbath. Today only a small number of Christians keep the biblical Sabbath, which runs from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset. Very few refrain from making a fire on their redefined "Sabbath." They began to make "graven images" and place them in church buildings. In short, a few aspects of what came to be called "the Old Testament" were incorporated into various forms of Christianity. Because of the partial acceptance of some of the Old Testament, the conflict between the two dispensations became invisible to most Christians.

Some Christians, of course, added some theories that "covered" the rejection of most of the Jewish law, such as the explanation that many of the laws were given only to punish the Jews, who were forced to obey them (for example, the Letter of Barnabas). Obviously these laws did not apply to Christians.

Paul could not have thought of, much less followed, any of these paths. He knew the law as a whole and in all its parts. It was to him, as to other Jews, a unity. God gave the law in its entirety. The Bible says so. He could not have picked this law and that law, said that *these* were given by God and that the others were not given by God, and

then pretended that he had achieved the grand reconciliation of the dispensation of the law and the dispensation of Christ.

When it came to the practical application of the law to gentiles, however, he had a free hand. The first dispensation was not given to gentiles. Moreover, they should not accept it. Paul could, however, recommend to them that the law contained some things that everyone ought to observe, such as the commandment “love your neighbor as yourself.”

Thus he could not “reconcile” the two dispensations by judiciously eliminating parts of the Hebrew Bible (the path later chosen by Christianity), but he could declare that gentiles as such were not bound by the law, but that they should follow its humanistic ethics.

This was his position until the Galatian controversy. He freely recommended Jewish ethics to his gentile converts in Thessalonica and Corinth. It doubtless seemed natural and obvious to him that gentiles were not under the Jewish law, but that they should follow Jewish ethics in matters such as sex and idolatry, since these accorded with nature and reason. The uproar in Galatia and its echoes in Romans arose because of the attempt of some Jewish Christians to make gentiles accept the first dispensation as such.

The circumcision party had a systematic and all-inclusive solution to the problem posed by two divine dispensations: the gentile converts must become Jewish and thereby belong to both dispensations—as did the original Jewish Christians. Here, of course, Paul dug in his heels: salvation was by faith in Christ alone. If gentile converts also had to become Jewish, they would be denying the efficacy of the sole means of salvation.

In Romans 7, however, Paul writes as if all humans, including gentiles, *are* under the Jewish law. This shift of viewpoint has a history. He had sometimes written to his gentile converts as if he were addressing Jews: in taking a wife, a convert should not act “*like*

the Gentiles who do not know God" (1 Thess. 4:5); *our* ancestors were "baptized into Moses" (1 Cor. 10:2).

In Galatians, where he most vociferously argued that gentiles are not under the Jewish law, he had nevertheless generalized the law, as if it did cover everyone: "Scripture declares the whole world is a prisoner of Sin" (Gal. 3:22).

More importantly, the main theme of Romans is the equality of Jew and gentile: Jews are not privileged. In Romans 2, he maintains the distinction between Jews under the law and gentiles not under the law (2:12-15). But they are under the "law written on their hearts," which contains the same commandments as does the Jewish law (2:15). Moreover, Jew and gentiles are equally under Sin (Rom. 3:9). The equality of the two laws and the result that all are equally under Sin made it easy to put both Jew and gentile into the larger category, "all people." We see this in Rom. 3:19: "whatever the law says it speaks to those who are *under the law*, so that *every mouth* may be silenced, and the *whole world* may be accountable for God."

Thus raising the *status* of gentiles to be equal to that of Jews leads Paul in Romans 7 to put all people, both Jew and gentile, under the Jewish law. Having argued extensively that gentiles are not under the old dispensation and must not be forced to join it, he now treats everyone as a sinner condemned by the law.

Now we shall look at the arguments in Romans 7, where we shall see Paul *wrestling* with his enormous problem. If we take humanity as a whole to be under the Jewish law, what does this mean for them and for their relationship with Christ?

Romans 7:1-6: Plight and Solution, Round Four: Law, Flesh, Sinful Passions, and Dying with Christ

The plight of chapter 6 (slavery to Sin) is continued in the first part of

Romans 7, with an added complication: the law, which was merely mentioned in 6:14: “we are not under law but under grace.”

Paul now begins to explain being under the law and getting out from under it. The illustration he chooses also depends on chapter 6: death. In chapter 6, Christians die with Christ, and in Romans 7 Paul begins the expansion of this theme by saying that “the law is binding on a person only during that person’s lifetime” (7:2). For example, a married woman is under the law of fidelity to her husband only as long as *he* lives. When *he* dies, *she* is free to marry someone else (7:3). In chapter 6, the person who dies is the person who escapes; in the illustration in 7:2-3, one person’s death releases another person, not one’s self. Paul promptly returns to the formulation of chapter 6: “*you* have died to the law through the body of Christ” (7:4).

Here, as in 6:14, the Law is treated as an enslaving force, but thus far we have no explanation of this. The next verse begins an explanation and also introduces a new term into the mix: “While we were living in the *Flesh*, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death” (7:5).

Although in general Paul’s theology is not based on human psychology, but on the plan and actions of God, the present point does appear to be psychological. We shall postpone consideration of “aroused by the law” until the next section, where Paul expands on the point.

The term *Flesh* in 7:5 is on the road toward being a personification like Sin. As a semi-personification, “Flesh” is trickier than Sin, because Paul can go from regarding *Flesh* as a power to regarding *flesh* as our mortal bodies. But the formulation of 7:5 gives *flesh* a special status: “when we were living in the *Flesh*” cannot mean “when we were living in our skins,” since Paul and his readers were still alive. Thus, here *Flesh* is reminiscent of Sin personified: an inimical power that is escaped by dying with Christ (7:4).

To continue with the terminology of 7:5: people in the Flesh are governed by “sinful passions.” This time “passions” is the correct translation. In 6:12, the term was “desires,” though it was translated “passions.” In 7:7–8, however, “desire” reappears with the specific connotation of “covet.”

I close this brief section at the point where it parallels the previous sections on plight and solution. In 7:4–6, Paul mentions the solution first (“you have died to the law through the body of Christ”). Then he describes the plight as “living in the Flesh,” governed by the “sinful passions” that the law had aroused (7:5). He then reformulates the solution: Christians are “released from the law,” “dead to that which held us captive,” no longer enslaved “under the old written code,” but “in the new life of the Spirit (7:6).” This is a replay of chapter 6, with the addition of more discussion of the law.

Romans 7:7-13: Plight, Round Five: The First “I” Section: Sin Uses the Law

The plights of humanity described in the two “I” sections of Rom. 7, which we are about to consider, do not find their solution until chapter 8.

Paul begins chapter 7 by asking, “Is the law Sin?” He has to ask the question because he has, in effect, just said that the law is in the same general category as Sin: It is part of the problem, not the solution. It is deeply implicated in the human plight, so deeply that it, like Sin, must be escaped by participating in the death of Christ. The difference between that and being the same as Sin is pretty narrow.

To give us a little more perspective on Paul’s argument in this passage we should recall Galatians 3. The law was “added” to “imprison all things under the power of Sin, so that what was promised through faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who faith” (3:19–22). In Galatians, the law’s *role* in the divine economy

was to create the monolithic problem that only Christ could solve. In this connection Paul made a vicious comment about the law: “it was ordained through angels by a mediator. Now a mediator involves more than one party; but God is one” (3:20). Thus, in Galatians Paul temporarily put forward the view that God did not directly give the law while simultaneously saying that it served a needed function: locking up everyone until the arrival of faith.

But Paul had believed all of his life that God gave the law and that the law was good. And so, after saying that angels ordained the law, he proceeded to prove his points by quoting his Scripture (e.g., Gal. 4:23–31).

In the case of our passage in Romans, after identifying the law as a power that enslaves and that can be escaped only by death, he *recoils*. He answers his question, is the law Sin, negatively. “By no means!” (NRSV); “Certainly not!” (NIV); “Of course not!” (NEB; JB); or, as we translated *mē genoito* in my first course in Greek, “Hell, no” and “Not by a damned sight.” Paul’s phrase is a forceful negative.

Paul now repeats more elaborately his psychological suggestion of 7:5 (our passions, aroused by the law): “If it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, ‘You shall not covet.’ But Sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness” (7:7–8). As Craig Hill puts it, “law is the parental command not to raid the biscuit tin, an injunction that draws attention to and makes all the more desirable the very thing it prohibits.”¹⁴ I am also reminded of the combination essay and short story by Edgar Allan Poe titled “The Imp of the Perverse.” This Imp within humans tempts us to do things merely because we feel we should *not*. The impulse is self-destructive. This explanation of how

14. Craig Hill, “Romans,” in *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, ed. John Barton and John Muddiman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1096 col. 1.

the law is positively connected with Sin makes sense in some cases. Will it work for all?

About thirty years ago, John Ziesler pointed out to me that “you shall not covet” is the only one of the Ten Commandments that Paul could use this way. Maybe the commandment not to covet the neighbor’s donkey (Exod. 20:17) makes one look at that donkey with covetous eyes. One could not, however, say that Sin, finding opportunity in the commandment not to murder, made me a murderer. One does not go through life dishonoring his or her father and mother because the commandment says to honor them.

Paul has not found a thorough explanation of how the Law, which is good, functions together with Sin to produce bad results—sinful actions. He got into this by earlier making the law part of the old order that *everyone* must escape, and then retracting the suggestion that the law is equivalent to Sin and giving it merely a functional role in sinfulness. It is the tool of Sin, facilitating the spread of Sin. He repeats this in the following verses: “the very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me” (7:10); “Sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me” (7:11).

Quite remarkably, to complete the recoil from the suggestion that the law is the same as Sin, he declares that “the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good” (7:12). He goes further: the law did *not* bring death to him. “It was Sin, working death in me through what is good . . .” (7:13).

Here the law is depicted as a tool to be used by a strong force. The force that uses it is not God, who formulated it and sent it forth through Moses, but rather Sin. This gives Sin a truly remarkable amount of power.

I compare this once more with Galatians: In Galatians, where Paul also said negative things about the law and assigned it the negative

function of “imprisoning all things under Sin,” that was *the intention of God*. God was using the law and Sin for his own purposes—locking up everyone until Christ came.

But once Sin is personified and has *its own power* (as it does in Romans), it uses the Law to produce sinfulness *against God’s will*. It is the personification of Sin that prods Paul in Romans 7 to present a picture of humans who are helpless and of divine laws that are ineffectual. In the next section we shall see that humans are forced to do evil not just against God’s commandments, but against their own desires and intention. The commandment remains “holy and just and good” (7:12); but that does not matter, since Sin controls the outcome.

Now we must ask, who is the *I* in this passage? The “I” sections (there are two) require a little explanation in advance. In English translation there is an “I” in 7:7, “I would not have known Sin.” At this point, “I” is indicated within the verb. On the first day of Latin class, one learns that one may say *ego te amo*, “I love you,” or merely *te amo*, “I love you.” In the latter case “I” is indicated by the ending of the verb, *o*. If the verb were *amas*, the translation would be “you love.” In Greek as in Latin, it is unnecessary to write a pronoun that is the subject of the sentence. Using the pronoun therefore is a form of emphasis. *Ego te amo* would mean *I* love you.

In Romans 7, the emphatic *ego* (the word is the same in Latin and Greek) does not appear until verse 9: “I was once alive apart from the law . . .” It is repeated in verses 10, 14, 17, 20, 24, 25. *Ego* appears three times in Romans 11, and apart from that it occurs only four times in the rest of the letter (not counting quotations). That is, the heavy use of *ego* makes Rom. 7:9–25 stand out stylistically. This calls the attention of the reader to the “I” and requires an explanation.

In the present case, the first “I” section (vv. 7–13), the verbs are in

the past tense. “I *was* once alive apart from the law . . .” (7:9); “when the commandment *came*” (7:9); “Sin *deceived* me” (7:11), and so on. When one asks about the identity of the “I” figure, the first reaction is that the “I” is Paul. But that is not necessarily the case. The “I” in 1 Corinthians 13 surely includes more people than just Paul. It is the equivalent of “one”: “If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels . . .” (1 Cor. 13:1). In the formal style of days gone by, in English one would say, “If one spoke in the tongues . . .” Thus “I” does not necessarily mean “I, the author, as an individual.”

Scholarly study has therefore suggested other identifications of the “I” in Romans 7. With regard to the present section, 7:9–13, in the past tense, we should note two phrases: “I was once alive apart from the law” (7:9) and “Sin . . . deceived me” (7:11). Paul himself was never alive apart from the law, but Adam was. In the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2–3), Adam and Eve were created before God gave the commandment not to eat the fruit of a specific tree. Thus Adam was alive apart from the law.

What about “deceived me”? In the conversation between God and Eve after Adam and Eve transgressed, Eve says, “The serpent deceived me” (Gen. 3:13). The verb “deceived” in Rom. 7:11 is virtually the same as “deceived” in Gen. 3:13. In Genesis it is *apataō*; in Romans it is *exapataō*, which we may regard as a variant of the same word. Paul probably remembered the verb as *exapataō*, since he used it in quoting the story of Eve in 2 Cor. 11:3.¹⁵ I accept the view that is common to many modern scholars, that the “I” in Rom. 7:9–13 is intended to be Adam, speaking on behalf of humanity.

15. We should remind ourselves that the text of the Septuagint that Paul had studied was not precisely the same as the Septuagint restored by modern scholars. Paul remembered what he learned as a boy, which may have varied slightly from the scholarly reconstruction of “the Septuagint.” See above, chap. 03b, p. 44.

**Romans 7:14-25: Plight, Round Six: The Second “I” Section:
Human Helplessness to Do Good and Avoid Doing Evil**

The next “I” section is Rom. 7:14–26. In this section, the verbs are in the present tense, and the human situation is even worse than it was in 7:9–13. It begins: “For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under Sin.” As a slave of Sin, the “I” figure cannot do what he wants, but rather he has to do what he hates. He (or she) wants what the law requires, which is good, but he does the opposite. He is enslaved to the “Sin that dwells within [him].” Nothing good dwells within him (or her), that is, in his flesh (7:14–18). In addition to the law of God, which he wishes to obey, there is “another law” in his members, at war with the law of his mind, “making [him] captive to the law of Sin that dwells in [his] members” (7:19–23).

In terms of content, the second “I” section is by far the most pessimistic portion of the Pauline letters. Sin is completely dominant over the “I”, and the “I” is totally helpless. Not only did Sin kill (7:11); not only did “Sin work death in [the “I” figure] through what is good . . .” (7:13), as in the first “I” section, now Sin totally controls every single one of the actions of the “I” figure and prevents him from, for example, giving alms to the poor, being kind to his mother, and helping blind people across the street. Sin does not need to deceive him, as Satan deceived Eve (as in the previous section). Now Sin directly rules. Since he, the “I” figure, is flesh, Sin forces him to do evil, such as, for example, cutting off food stamps for the needy. These despicable acts, however, are not the fault of the “I” figure, since he really wanted to do good.

This does not sound at all like the usual Paul, who certainly had a lot of pain and numerous difficulties, but who always seems to have been confident that he was doing precisely what God wanted

him to do and what he wanted for himself: winning gentiles for Christ. Elsewhere he thinks that he had been successful: “But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him” (2 Cor. 2:14). And he had also always found that he *could and did* obey the commandments, rather than being forced to disobey time after time (Phil. 3).

The first “I” section, in which Sin used the law to trick people into sinning, posed a serious problem: what was God doing? Did he merely give the law and then absent himself, turning it over to an enemy power? The second “I” section makes the question of what God was doing more acute. He seems to have created creatures who are fleshly and then allowed everything fleshly to become deeply evil. This runs counter to everything that Paul thought. He thought that God was good and that he would respond favorably to those who call on him.

Many Protestants, of course, have believed that the second “I” section is strictly autobiographical, especially *in the present tense*. Paul describes himself at that very moment as being totally in the thrall of Sin and unable to do anything good. This interpretation, if true, would firmly establish the eternal truth, *simul justus et peccator*: humans are simultaneously just and sinful. They are just by God’s juridical decision to impute (fictional) righteousness to them although they are utterly corrupt and commit only sinful acts. Here, some propose, Paul describes precisely the interior situation of himself and of all Christians. They customarily harm the poor and weak.

But, seriously, the reader should recognize that if Rom. 7:14–25 is Paul’s autobiography, someone else wrote the rest of the material that is attributed to him. If this had been Paul’s state, he would have been too depressed to conduct evangelical missions and to write letters to his churches, since he knew that he could do only harm, not good.

Thus I have to dismiss the view that these verses are Paul's autobiographical reflections on his own total enslavement to Sin. I think that the solution to the meaning of these horribly pessimistic verses is not far to seek. Paul, being a black-and-white thinker, liked to drive arguments to extremes, and he is pursuing this mode of argument from chapter to chapter in Romans 5–7. The human plight gets worse and worse. Note this sequence in his description of the state of humanity.

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| Chaps. 1–3 | All humans are transgressors. |
| Chap. 5 | Adam's sin makes everyone sin. |
| Chap. 6 | Humans are enslaved to sin. |
| Chap. 7:1–6 | Humans are in bondage under the law and under Flesh, following their sinful passions. |
| Chap. 7:14–25 | Humans are totally helpless because Sin controls them, makes them do evil, and prevents them from doing good. |

I do not claim that this is a smooth and orderly progression from bad to worse to worst, but the plight certainly becomes more hopeless as Paul's argument proceeds.

In general, we may say that Paul wanted to depict life without Christ as being bad at best, eventually becoming horrific. Helplessness to do what one wants and being bound to doing what one does not want is a terrible condition.

The result is to make life in Christ stand out all the more. In view of what follows in chapter 8, this explanation of the progression of Paul's descriptions of the human condition seems overwhelmingly likely. Thus Paul is describing neither himself, nor Christians in general; he is describing the worst state that he can imagine¹⁶ and imputing it to

16. Some horrors, such as the Holocaust, were unimaginable, though perhaps his description of Sin as all-powerful covers them, too.

people who have not died with Christ. The “I” is generalizing; not all people as represented by Adam, but all people who are not in Christ.

I am not arguing that it is in fact *not* the case that Christians sin. On the contrary, to err is human, and in this sense everyone remains a sinner. I am arguing that the total continuing depravity of humans and the depiction of them as helpless to do anything good is part of an *argument* and does not constitute Paul’s ordinary view of humans and sin. In numerous places he says diverse things that are not compatible with the idea of helplessness to do anything except evil.

One of the main points of this book is that the works of Paul have to be looked at whole and, in particular, one must pay attention to *conclusions*. The habit of Christian scholars for centuries has been to find a sentence or two that is part of one of Paul’s numerous arguments and to say *this* is Paul’s theology. *This* is what he really thought, and all we have to do now is find another sentence or two and to turn these three or four sentences into a system. We can ignore the other things he wrote. Thus, in their minds, “righteousness by faith and not by works of law,” “reckoned,” and “I do not do what I want and the evil I do not want is what I do” can be combined to *constitute* the heart of Paul’s theology. But all of these are parts of *arguments* and are not *his own conclusions to those arguments*. Nor do these sentences, all taken from Romans, apply very well to other letters, especially not to the Corinthian correspondence.

Finally, to complete our study of Romans 7, we must note a last difficulty, one posed by the concluding verses. After writing that “I” am “captive to the law of Sin” (7:23), he cries out, “Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (7:24–25a). The last sentence introduces the theme of Romans 8, which is the solution to the predicament of humans as described in Romans 7.

The difficulty is that after crying out “Thanks be to God . . .” he

adds another verse: “So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of Sin” (7:25b). This seems to cancel the thanksgiving, which cannot be Paul’s intent, since in the next verse (8:1) he continues to describe the glorious salvation from the grip of Sin. I do not know of a really good explanation for the placement of 7:25b after the thanksgiving for God’s rescue operation, and so I shall not offer one. Paul’s main intention can be clearly seen by continuing to Romans 8.

Romans 7: Summary

We divided Romans 7 into three sections, including two “I” passages. In section 1, Rom. 7:1–6, we saw that Paul implicated the law in the problem of chapter 6, slavery to the power of Sin. In the phrase, “our sinful passions, aroused by the law,” he indicated a possible explanation of how it is that the law is on the side of Sin. In this section the solution to the problem of bondage to Sin and the law is “death through the body of Christ” (7:4).

At the end of Rom. 7:6, the reader thinks that the discussion of Sin and the law is concluded: by dying with Christ believers have been released from the law and are “dead to that which held us captive.” But in fact 7:1–5 was just a warm-up. In the second section of the chapter, the first “I” passage, in 7:7–13, Paul asks if the law is Sin, a necessary question because of the close connection between them in 7:1–6. He answers with a resounding “No!” Rather, Sin used its power to turn the law to its own purposes, not God’s purposes. Sin made humanity (in the persons of Adam and Eve) commit sin. God had given them the commandment that they were not to eat of the forbidden fruit, and so that is just what they did. So the law is holy and good, but Sin uses it for evil purposes. We concluded that the “I” figure in 7:7–13 is Adam.

In the third section of the chapter, the second “I” passage, in

7:14–25, the plight of the human is even worse than heretofore described. Humans are completely dominated by Sin and are totally helpless to do anything that is good. The law is good, but it is powerless. Humans do not do the good things that they wish to do, and they commit sins and crimes that they wish not to commit. We concluded that in this section Paul has pushed the description of the human plight as close to the dark side as he could. Humanity without Christ is helpless to avoid heinous sins. In this passage the law is ineffective rather than a tool of sin. The “I” in this passage is presumably the human without Christ, who is depicted as living in total depravity.

Romans 7 is difficult and confusing partly because in the first section Paul goes back and forth between the victory of Sin (7:5) and its defeat (7:6). And then after that he returns to the pessimistic view of the power of Sin (the rest of Rom. 7 until the cry of victory in 7:25).

Moreover, the role of the law varies within Romans 7. In 7:8–13, the law is good but is captured by Sin and made to produce evil results. Yet in 7:14–24 the law of God is good, and it is not *employed* by Sin. Rather, the “I” figure holds to it in his mind, but is powerless to obey it, since the good law is being combated by “another law” in his members, which overwhelms the law of God.

I think that these back-and-forth flows of the letter in part show the disadvantage of Paul’s thinking and dictating on his feet as he struggles with difficulties. The *basic* problem, the one that leads to reversals in the argument, is the issue that we discussed above, to which there is no true solution: Paul knows of two divine dispensations. One is represented by the call of Israel and the giving of the law. Since that is a divine dispensation, it must be good. The second is the sending of Christ to save the world on the sole basis of faith in him, apart from the election and the law. Paul had devoted

his life to the second dispensation. And, as I explained, if the law is not necessary and useful in the new dispensation, the principle that “if you are not for me you are against me” comes into play. Paul’s thoughts about the law then tend toward seeing it as being in opposition to the Christian message, and then toward being on the side of Sin. *But*, when he perceives this drift in what he is writing, he recoils from it. God gave the law, it must be good.

Paul was a highly rational man¹⁷ and in general his positions are quite straightforward, though his arguments may be a little difficult. But he cannot have a single, straightforward position on the role of the law in his Christian congregations. If God gave the law and it is good, then his converts should obey it, which would mean that they become Jewish as well as Christians. But the whole point of the second dispensation, the sending of Christ, is that he is the sole means of salvation and nothing else is necessary. Thus the law must not be enforced.

In Romans 7, then, we see Paul *struggling* with an enormous difficulty, which not even he could completely resolve. This is not quite the last word on this subject, as we shall see when we discuss Romans 11.

Romans 8: Solution, Round Five: Life in Christ Jesus

When we reached the end of Romans 7, we had seen six formulations of humanity’s “plight” and four formulations of remedies (“solutions”)—three of which have to do with the death of Christ. In Romans 8 we come to a super solution, which immediately follows on the worst description of the human condition—total helplessness to do what is right and avoid what is evil (Rom. 7.14-25). To solve

17. Here as above (pp. 259-61) I include as “rational” seeing visions, hearing voices, and the mystical feeling that he was in Christ and that Christ was in him. These are not *irrational*, though there is no scientific explanation of these phenomena.

the two formulations of the bad state of humanity in Rom. 7, chapter 8 has a lot of work to do: it must answer numerous negative descriptions of the human condition. We may call the answer of Rom. 8 “Life in Christ Jesus.”

A summary in the form of a table may be helpful:

<u>Plight</u>	<u>Solution</u>
Human disobedience	Righteousness by faith
Adam’s sin	Christ’s death
Slavery to Sin	Dying with Christ
Law, Flesh, Sinful Passions	Dying with Christ
Sin uses the Law	
Humans are helpless to do good or avoid evil	
All the above	Life in Christ Jesus

After the difficulties of Romans 7—both the depth of the human plight and Paul’s various statements about Sin and the Law—everything turns bright with chapter 8.

It now turns out that “those who are in Christ Jesus” (8:1) do not share in the predicaments described in Rom. 7:7–25. They have been “set free from the law of sin and death” (8:2). By sending his son, God “condemned sin in the flesh,” “in order that the just requirement of the law will be fulfilled in us” (8:4). That is, Christians who “walk according to the Spirit,” *do* obey “the just requirement of the law,” rather than being unable to do what is right.

The word translated “the just requirement” in the NRSV is similarly translated in the NIV (“righteous requirements”) and JB (“the Law’s just demands”). The NEB lacks the adjective “just” or “righteous”: “so that the commandment of the law may find fulfilment in us.” The reason for the frequent addition of the word *righteous* or *just* is

that the Greek word translated “commandment” is *dikaiōma*, which is obviously related to *dikaïosynē*, “righteousness.” Paul wrote only “commandment,” and he did not imply that some of the commandments are “just” while some are misguided, which is a possibility raised by some translations. Since God gave the commandments of the law, each commandment is obviously “just” and “right.” Paul uses the same word in the plural, meaning only “commandments,” in 2:26: “if those who are uncircumcised keep the requirements of the law.”

In Romans 8, as always, God and Christ are main actors, but the Spirit comes to the fore. It stands as the opposite to the Flesh, which is sometimes treated as a hostile power, rather than being merely human weakness. “You are not in the Flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you” (8:9). The Christians are still in their skins, and here the Flesh lines up with personified Sin, which appears frequently in earlier chapters.

Terminology in Romans 8: The Flesh

First, “flesh” (*sarx* in Greek) can have different meanings in Paul’s letters. (a) It often means simply the body in a neutral sense: all physical beings have a body. Thus, for example, Gal. 2:20 (“the life I live now I live in the flesh”); 1 Cor. 15:39 (“not all flesh is alike . . .”); 2 Cor. 4:11 (“our mortal flesh”).

(b) “Flesh” can mean “the sphere of human activity,” with an only slightly negative connotation. Christians “boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh” (Phil. 3:3). Paul himself has a lot to his credit in human activities, and he could be confident in his accomplishments (Phil. 3:3-4), except that fleshly achievements do not count. He regards them as worthless in comparison with

knowing Christ (3:8). This worthlessness is the negative connotation of all fleshly activity.

(c) “Flesh” is the sphere of human transgression. We have noted that Paul disapproves of human pleasures, termed “passions” and “desires.” Following one’s passions or desires is the way to destruction. For example:

- 1 Thess. 4:5: “. . . not with the passion of desire, like the Gentiles who do not know God . . .”
- Gal. 5:16: “Live by the Spirit . . . and do not satisfy the desire of the flesh.”¹⁸
- Rom. 6:12: “Do not let Sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions.”
- Rom. 7:5: “. . . our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death.”

I would put in this category most of the occurrences of “flesh” in Romans 8:

- v. 3–4: “the law, weakened by the flesh”
- vv. 5–6: “set their minds on things of the flesh”
- v. 7: “the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God”
- vv. 12–13: “if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”

18. NRSV: “Live by the Spirit . . . and do not gratify the desires of the flesh”; NIV: “live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature”; JB: “if you are guided by the Spirit you will be in no danger of yielding to self-indulgence”; NEB: “if you are guided by the Spirit you will not fulfil the desires of your lower nature.” Paul’s usage of “the flesh” cannot be explained in a translation, but changing it to “the sinful nature,” “self-indulgence,” or “your lower nature” disguises his argument, which entails the opposition of Flesh to Spirit. “Self-indulgence” versus “Spirit” is a much weaker antithesis. Leaving “flesh” in the translation (as in the NRSV) allows the reader to discover its connotation.

These passages make human flesh (= body) the arena of the struggle between good and evil, with a bent toward the dark side. I take “the deeds of the body” to refer to the weakness of humans, who tend to follow their own “passions and desires.”

(d) “Flesh” is a semi-personification. It is a stretch to interpret “flesh” as a power that is equivalent to Sin. The main reason for regarding Sin as sometimes a personified power is that it is the subject of sentences that contain a transitive verb—that is, it has activities and affects people. Sin takes over the law, Sin deceives, and so on. There is no equivalent usage for Flesh. Flesh appears to be a kind of semi-power because living people are said not to be in the flesh. If they are not in the flesh in the sense of “the body,” they are dead. Therefore these passages must refer to something other than “skin” that people can be “in” and that is in opposition to the Spirit. In these few cases, therefore, I call “flesh” a semi-personification of a power that is hostile to God. The relevant passage is Rom. 8:8–9: “those who are in the flesh cannot please God. . . . But you are not in the flesh.”¹⁹

Terminology in Romans 8: The Spirit

The words *spirit* and *spiritual* are very frequent in Paul and fairly common in the New Testament. According to Robert Morgenthaler’s statistical study, the word *spirit* (*pneuma*) occurs 146 times in the Pauline corpus (including the deuteropauline letters) and 379 times in the New Testament.²⁰ The appearances of the word in the entire Pauline corpus constitute approximately 38 percent of the occurrences of the word in the New Testament. In the letters that we regard as authentic, Paul used “spirit” 120 times, 31 percent

19. My four categories are intended to simplify the matter. For a more complicated explanation of “flesh” in Paul, see Eduard Schweizer, *sarx*, *TDNT* 7:125–51 (Paul); pp. 7:98–151 (the entire history of the word).

20. Robert Morgenthaler, *Statistik des neutestamentlichen Wortschatzes* (Frankfurt am Main: Gotthelf, 1958).

of the appearances in the entire New Testament. The other author who used “spirit” frequently was the author of Luke–Acts. The word occurs in Acts seventy times. “Spirit” occurs thirty-six times in Luke. Between them, Paul and the author of Luke–Acts account for approximately 60 percent of the appearances of the word.

While on this track, we should note that the word *spirit* occurs thirty-four times in Romans but even more often in 1 Corinthians (forty times), because of the discussion of “spiritual gifts.” The adjective “spiritual” occurs fifteen times in 1 Corinthians and only three times in Romans.

Thus “spirit” is definitely a well-used Pauline word and its appearance should never be a surprise. Nevertheless, the concentration in Romans 8 is remarkable: the noun appears twenty-one times in this one chapter; “God” occurs nineteen times; “Christ” occurs nine times. It is striking that “spirit” outnumbers even “God” and “Christ.”

In Romans 8, these three words appear in various combinations: “the *Spirit of life in Christ Jesus*” (v. 2); “You are in the Spirit since the *Spirit of God* dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the *Spirit of Christ* does not belong to him” (v. 9); “if *Christ* is in you . . . the *Spirit* is life” (v. 10); “*the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead [God]*” (v. 11); “all who are led by the *Spirit of God* are the children of God” (v. 14).

This is by no means a complete list, but we see that “Spirit of Christ” and “Spirit of God” are interchangeable. “Spirit” can briefly stand on its own (“you are in the Spirit”), but the Spirit that dwells in the believer is immediately termed “the Spirit of God” (v. 9). Christians are also said to have “the Spirit of Christ.” Thus we may say that Christians have the Spirit of God/Christ.

Romans 8 is the great chapter of “indwelling” and “participation.” In the previous chapter, we noted the two lines emphasized by Adolf

Deissmann: “Christ in Paul”; “Paul in Christ.”²¹ In Romans 8, the Spirit of God/Christ is *in* the believer, and the Christian is *in* the Spirit. But Paul can also use his earlier formulation: “Christ is in you” (v. 10). I see no distinction between “Christ is in you” and “the Spirit is in you”—except that “you have the Spirit” begins in Paul’s first letter, and “Christ is in you” slowly developed (as we shall see in chap. 25).

In the midst of the terminology of indwelling, the terminology of “union” also appears. Thus “we are children of God, and if children then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him” (v. 17). A little later in the passage we read that Christians are “conformed to the image of his Son” (v. 29). The language of these two passages takes us back to Phil. 3:10 (“sharing his sufferings by becoming like him in his death”) and 3:21 (“he will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory”). “Conformed” in Rom. 8:29 is the same word as “conformed” in Phil. 3:21.

There is also a striking similarity between Rom. 8:29 and 1 Corinthians 15. In Rom. 8:29 Paul states that Christians are “conformed to the *image* of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family,” and in 1 Cor. 15:49 that “we will also bear the *image* of the man of heaven.” This “conformity” to the “image,” via suffering and dying with Christ, carries over to the resurrection, when the bodies of Christians will be glorious, like Christ’s body (1 Cor. 15:43; Phil. 3:21). Christ is the “first fruits” of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20, 23), or “firstborn” (Rom. 8:29), but the raised Christians will be just like him: they are Christ’s joint heirs (Rom. 8:17), and they share his glory (see also Rom. 8:30). With

21. Adolf Deissmann, *St. Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History*, trans. W. E. Wilson, 2nd ed. (New York: Doran, 1926), 135.

Romans 8, one may compare the discussion of “sons” and “sonship” in Gal. 3:26—4:7 (above, pp. 520; 540–41).

“Suffering” is a crucial part of the scheme. In Rom. 8:17, Christians are joint heirs with Christ provided that “we suffer with him” (so also Phil. 3:10). Suffering with Christ may also be part of “dying with Christ,” the major theme of Romans 5.

Suffering *with* Christ, *sharing* his sufferings, seems to be a slight development from suffering in *imitation* of Christ or suffering *for* Christ, which is much more frequent and which appears earlier in the Pauline corpus than “suffering with” and “dying with.” Suffering is one of the main themes of 1 Thessalonians. Paul sympathizes with his converts, but his basic attitude is this: “Suffering is part of being Christian. Christ suffered, I suffer, you suffer. I warned you about this in advance. Don’t complain.” I believe that if at that time he had thought of “sharing Christ’s sufferings and therefore sharing his resurrection” he would have mentioned it. We shall discuss this as “development” in the concluding chapter.

In Romans, Paul comforts the readers partly by defining suffering as “sharing Christ’s sufferings,” and partly by comparing the present to the coming state: “the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us” (8:18). Moreover, the context of present-day human suffering is the suffering of every part of the created order. “The whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now,” (8:22), but in the future “the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay” (8:21).

God has everything in hand: “Those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son. . . . And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also righteoused [justified]; and those whom he righteoused he also glorified” (8:30).

Thus, despite the bleak pessimism of parts of Romans 7, which

I take to refer to non-Christians—humanity in its worst imaginable state—in Romans 8 the outlook for Christians is glorious. They have the Spirit, they are one with Christ Jesus, and they will share his glory.

The chapter concludes with Paul's greatest paean to the certainty of salvation (8:31–39). It should be read in its whole. It begins, “If God is for us, who is against us?” (8:31), and concludes

Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (8:38–39)

Romans 8 provides the full, perfect, and complete answer to the human plight depicted in Romans 7. Those in Christ, who have the Spirit, escape the power of Sin (and the law) and are able to behave accordingly. This chapter is Paul's *conclusion* to the human woes in chapter 7.

To understand Paul's theology, it is most instructive to note that in fact this chapter is not just the conclusion of Romans 7; it is the *conclusion* to the first half of Romans, which consists of a series of descriptions of the sinful human condition, followed by statements of how these are overcome by God, working through Christ and the Spirit. This grand conclusion—chapter 8—has at its heart Paul's longest statement of mystical union between the believer and Christ, with emphasis on the mutual indwelling of the believer and the Spirit. The believer is in the Spirit, the Spirit is in the believer.

I do not see how anyone can read through these descriptions of the human plight and of its cure without noting the relative importance of “righteousness by faith” in Romans 1–4 and “participation in Christ” in Romans 5–6 and 8. Righteousness by faith cures sin as transgression. Participation in Christ (or in the Spirit) cures bondage

to Sin, which is a power strong enough to manipulate God's law. It is participation with Christ that figures in the grand solution in chapter 8 (and this is also true of the intermediate solutions in Rom. 5 and 6). The *dikai-* root and the idea that God righteouses (justifies) people does not disappear in Romans 8. It occurs in 8:4 (the requirement [*dikaiōma*] of the law is fulfilled), and twice God is said to righteous ("justify") people: "those whom he called he righteoused" (8:30); "it is God who righteouses. Who is to condemn?" (8:33). But the formula "righteousness by faith" does not appear, nor, in fact, does the noun "righteousness" or the noun "faith." If "righteousness by faith" is the heart and soul of Paul's theology, why is it missing from Paul's most important chapter describing how Christ saves people from Sin?

The heart of Paul's soteriology is participation in Christ. That is why it *concludes* his arguments.

Theory and Reality

Paul, as we have seen, was a black-and-white thinker. One might also say that he was an extremist. In Rom. 7:14–23, the "I" cannot do anything good and is totally under the power of Sin. In Romans 8, the Christian is completely delivered from this situation. One may find a trace of exhortation in 8:13–14, but basically the chapter simply describes the happy state of the person who is in the Spirit of Christ and in whom the Spirit dwells.

When I was about eight years old, my school teacher taught us this rhyme:

There's enough good in the worst of us
 And enough bad in the best of us
 That it doesn't behoove any of us
 To talk about the rest of us.

As far as I can tell, this is one of the rare folk sayings that is totally

true. There are doubtless people who are close to being totally evil and people who are close to being totally good, but for the most part we are mixed. I suspect that most people are good most of the time. They are polite, kind to dogs and children, honest, and sincere. There is usually at least a small streak of larceny or cheating in each person, some degree of hypocrisy, and some malice toward others, but basically most people are pretty good.

I, of course, cannot prove any of this. I have not examined the actions of everyone on earth, and I cannot peer into their hearts and minds. I'm not sure how well I can examine my own. But, still, I think that evil and good are mixed in humanity, with good predominating most of the time.

Paul seldom wrote anything that is as *moderate* as the above description. He tended to push things to extremes. Thus the totally bleak picture of the "I" in Romans 7 is fully reversed in Romans 8 as he went from one extreme to another. His theory of total depravity or total participation in Christ does not allow for nuances of behavior in daily life.

Many scholars, however, have maintained that Paul intended to describe the life of Christians both in the portrayals of people as being totally helpless to do good (Rom. 7:14-24) *and* in the account of those who are in Christ and who have been set free by the Spirit of life in Christ (Rom. 8:1-2)—and that both views are true at the same time. In Romans 7, one scholar proposed, Paul acknowledges "frankly that the Christian, so long as he remains in this present life, remains in a real sense a slave of sin . . . since he still has a fallen nature." When the author turns to Romans 8, he writes this: "Being characterized by the indwelling of God's Spirit, this life which is promised for the man who is righteous by faith is necessarily also a life in which God's law is being established and fulfilled."²²

This is not what Paul wrote. He wrote first that the "I"—whether

everybody or Paul himself or non-Christians—was in a horrible condition, unable to control his actions; and then that the Christians are saved from precisely that wretched state. As a black-and-white thinker, an extremist, and a debater, he describes one state as being almost unimaginably bad and the other as being blissful.

Thus while I think that humans are in fact mixtures of good and bad and all the shades in between, I do not attribute that idea to Paul. His view was “all or nothing.” And, since it was all or nothing, the terrible condition of Rom. 7:14–24 and the wonderful experience of being freed from Sin and the Flesh in Rom. 8:1–4 and 8:9–11 cannot coexist in the same person at the same time. Paul wanted to move people from one condition to the other, and that seems to me to be the only satisfactory interpretation of the change from Romans 7 to Romans 8. The non-Christian experience is very bad, the Christian experience is very good.

Put another way, we can say that Paul believed in human *transformation* when converts united with Christ. They were no longer under Sin, and so they did not sin. When a sin appeared in the Corinthian congregation he was surprised and appalled.

J. E. B. Cranfield, in arguing that both the end of chapter 7 and the beginning of chapter 8 describe the daily life of the Christian, was making these important verses conform to the dogma of *simul iustus et peccator*, “at the same time righteous and a sinner.” But these two states are not mixed or scrambled together in Romans 7–8—they are sequential.

Here as elsewhere we must see Paul not as the inventor, for the first time in history, of a complete theology (an account of God and his actions) and anthropology (an account of humanity). He was an evangelist, organizer, and persuader of a very high order. He *also* was

22. C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 1:370–71.

caught in a bind that most people no longer feel: the conflict between the first dispensation (God chose Israel and gave the Israelites the law) and the second dispensation (God sent Christ to save the whole world on the same basis, faith in Christ). We need to see that he was *wrestling* with this (certainly intellectually and probably emotionally) and that he sometimes felt the need to separate the two dramatically: the reign of the law is accompanied by Sin, enslavement, and death; being in Christ gives freedom, peace, and the presence of the Spirit.

In the concluding chapter I shall offer a little meditation on the error of insisting that Paul was an academic thinker, akin to Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, who was constructing a systematic set of dogmas.

I shall return for a moment to Lightfoot's view of what Paul did after his conversion when he went into Arabia. Paul, Lightfoot proposed, had to sort out the law first of all, and therefore he went to Mount Sinai, where he developed the theology of Romans before he began his missionary endeavors.²³ This would mean that he kept it to himself for a long period of time before unleashing it on the church of Rome. But more importantly, we see in Romans (as well as in Galatians) that Paul was still struggling to explain the role of the law in the divine economy. He did not sort it all out in Arabia.

23. Above, pp. 88–89.

Romans, Part 2: The Two Dispensations, God's Righteousness, and the Fate of Israel

The Underlying Issue in Romans 9–11

If Romans 7 is the most difficult chapter in the Pauline corpus, it is closely followed by Romans 9–11. These chapters ask the question, “What about the Jewish people?” Paul here faces another aspect of his problem with the two dispensations. The issue is now not the law, but the election of Israel. How can it be valid if God sent Christ to save the world? He goes back and forth, somewhat as he did in Romans 7, before reaching the grand conclusion of Rom. 11:32: God will be merciful to all.

In philosophical terms, one of the issues of these chapters goes under the heading “theodicy,” a word that combines *theos* (God) and *dikē* (righteousness). In its original form, theodicy posed the question of why evil continues in a world ruled by a good God. The existence and pervasiveness of evil has made many people ask whether or not

God really is both good and omnipotent and, if he is, whether or not it is *righteous* of him, or *fair*, to allow evil to flourish as it does. This is a question that has been studied and debated for many centuries and in different religions and cultures. John Milton wrote his greatest work in an effort to “justifie the wayes of God to men.”¹ People who think that they have solved the problem turn out not to have many supporters. The question remains open.

The issue that dominates Paul’s discussion of theodicy, however, is the election of Israel, not the general question of a good God who permits evil. He had to ask whether or not God acted *justly* in choosing Israel and giving them the covenant and the promises, and then deciding to save the world without regard to the covenant. We begin by recalling his earlier words on theodicy, which have to do with whether or not God justly rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked. He does not ask why there is evil in a world created by a good God, but whether or not, granted evil, God judges people fairly.

God’s Righteousness in Romans 1-3

Prior to Romans 9–11, the question of the “Righteousness of God” makes three appearances in Romans: 1:17 and 3:5, and more substantially in 3:21–26. We shall briefly reconsider these before attempting to explain chapters 9–11.

In Rom. 1:16–17 Paul states that the gospel (good news) “is the power of God to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it *the righteousness of God* is revealed . . .” The section then describes the wrath with which God treats the wicked (1:18–32). This theme continues into chapter 2: the wicked are “storing up wrath for [themselves] on the day of wrath, when

1. John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, bk. 1, line 26.

God's righteous judgment will be revealed" (2:5). God gives people their just deserts: to those who do good, "glory and honor"; to the wicked, "anguish and distress" (2:9).

Thus God treats people as they deserve, even though punishment and reward may be reserved for the day when his judgment will be revealed (2:5). The topic resumes in chapter 3, where Paul states that the Jews were entrusted with "the words of God" (3:2). But if they were not faithful to those words, does their infidelity expose a fault in the plan? No, for God will punish those who deserve it. This will show his glory. But does that mean that his glory is proved or enhanced by transgression, so that evil produces good? No. The unrighteous are sinners (3:3-10).

After the catena of quotations from Paul's Scripture with which he proves that no one is righteous (3:10-18; see pp 622-23), he returns directly to the righteousness of God: God's righteousness has now been revealed apart from the law. This is "the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who have faith." This righteousness applies to all equally, both Jew and gentile (3:21-30).

At this point, the "righteousness of God" in the sense of theodicy (whether or not God plays fair) begins to slide into the righteousness of humans who put their faith in Christ. The two topics can go by the same title ("the righteousness of God"), and they seem to become the same thing: *God* is proved to be fair and just because he provides righteousness for *people* who put their faith in Christ.

Within this section, Paul also applies the death of Christ to the issue of God's righteousness in the sense of "justice." Atonement is available to all through the blood of Christ (3:24-25). God presented him as a sacrifice "in order to show his [own] righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he righteouses the one who has faith in Jesus"

(3:25-26). The thinking here is that since in the past God in fact had sometimes not given people their just deserts, but had ignored sins, he sent Christ to suffer and die in place of those sinners. Thus God remained righteous, since he exacted payment for sin.

At the end of the section, Paul realizes that the equality of Jew and gentile (3:22-25) may “overthrow the law,” but he simply dismisses that possibility. “We uphold the law” (3:31).

God’s Righteousness in Romans 9-11: The Question of Israel

The relatively brief discussions in Romans 1-3 of whether or not God is fair and upright show that Paul realized that the topic was difficult, or at least complicated. If one surveys human history one does not see that evil is always punished while good is always rewarded. Following a long tradition, Paul proposed that the proof of God’s justice would come at the judgment. Moreover, Christ’s death covers the unpunished sins of others.

In chapter 9, Paul directly confronts what is to him the *main problem of the righteousness of God*: the two dispensations. The opening verses show that this is no longer only a question of academic theology but also of personal anguish. The anguish presupposes an opening negative view of the fate of Israel. Paul is afraid that Jews, the vast majority of whom did not accept Jesus as the Christ and Son of God, will not be saved.

I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh. (Rom. 9:2-3)

He then indicates that God has not withdrawn the advantages of the Jewish people, which he lists:

They are Israelites, and to them belong the sonship,² the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship [the temple service], and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah [*Christos*], who is over all. [May] God [be] blessed forever. Amen. (Rom. 9:4-5)

Paul does not wish to deny any part of the first dispensation. Whatever is in Scripture about the status of Israel in the sight of God is true.

On the other hand, he needs to reduce the comprehensiveness of this status in order to make room for a second dispensation. Therefore he promptly states that “not all Israelites truly belong to Israel, and not all of Abraham’s children are his true descendants” (9:6). According to the Bible, the promises to Abraham descended through Isaac, not through his brother Ishmael. Isaac had two sons, Esau and Jacob. God loved Jacob but hated Esau, which meant that the promises to Abraham descended only through Jacob (9:10-13).

Does this apparently arbitrary selectivity show that God is unrighteous? More literally, Paul poses the question this way: “there is no injustice [*adikia*] with God, is there?”³ He answers with his strong expression, “not by a damned sight!” (9:14).

Why is arbitrary selectivity not unjust? Because God has often said that he would pick and choose as he wished. “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy” (9:15, quoting Exod. 33:19). If that is the case, surely humans cannot be at fault. He offers a possible complaint: If God chooses some and rejects others without reason, surely the rejected cannot be punished or condemned. That is not fair (9:19).

Paul’s answer is that the creator has a right to choose: “Will what

2. I continue to use “sonship” rather than “adoption” (NRSV, NIV) because “adoption” weakens Paul’s radical view that ties the Son of God to the people of God, who are called “sons.” See p. 541.

3. The question “is there unrighteousness with God” begins with the particle *mē*, which expects a negative answer.

is molded say to the one who molds it, ‘Why have you made me like this?’” (9:20). The potter can do anything he wants with the clay. God decided to endure for a while “the objects of wrath that are made for destruction.” He did this “to make known the riches of his glory for the objects of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory” (9:22–23). The lucky recipients are those “whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles”—that is, Christians (9:24). A catena of quotations from the prophets follows to prove the consistency that God has shown in arbitrarily choosing some but not others (9:25–29).

In this book I have often expressed my admiration for Paul’s argumentative abilities. He was adroit; and he showed variety, flexibility, insight, and often ingenuity in arguing for his various positions. I cannot praise him for this argument. In Romans 3, Paul was at pains to show that God treated people according to their just deserts; he punished the wicked and favored the good. If he let some cases slip through his hands, he made up for the lack of punishment by sending Christ as a sacrifice. That he now says that God pays no attention to what anyone deserves, but merely picks and chooses with no set guidelines, is disappointing. It is not novel, and it does not show that God treats people justly, in accord with what they deserve. Could he have done any better?

For the *nth* time, we note that he was facing a problem to which there is no solution, given his basic premises, that God chose Israel and that he saves only through Christ. The only thing he can do is reduce or redefine the “Israel” that God chose. In this passage, it turns out to be those who put their faith in Christ: “in order to make known the riches of his glory for the objects of mercy . . . *even* us whom he has called not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles” (9:23–24).

Instead of “even us whom he has called,” the NRSV has “including us

whom he has called.” There is, however, no Greek word introducing “us.” I have followed the ASV and the NIV by writing “even us” to make the sentence a little smoother. Paul did not imply that there are “others whom he has called” in addition to “us.” The JB correctly has, “Well, we are those people.” Thus at this point Paul is maintaining that God’s selective “call” includes only those who have faith in Christ.

Romans 9:30–10:10: The Failing of the Jewish People

Paul may have realized that it would be a better argument if he had some rationale to explain why God originally chose Israel but narrowed his “call” to the Jews and gentiles who are in Christ. Perhaps he was uncomfortable making God’s choice entirely arbitrary. Paul, after all, liked arguments based on evidence, and mere assertion may have been unsatisfactory. At any rate, now he tries to find a fault that applies to Jews as such—except those who are in Christ.

I shall quote in full the next two-and-half verses, 9:30–33a according to the NRSV:

What are we to say? Gentiles, who did not strive for righteousness, have attained it, that is, righteousness through faith; but Israel, who did strive for the righteousness that is based on law, did not succeed in fulfilling that law. Why not? Because they did not strive for it on the basis of faith, but as if it were based on works.

This is one of the portions of Romans 9–11 on which Protestants have hung the charge that Jews were guilty of works righteousness, each trying to earn his or her own salvation by compiling more merits than demerits and thus “forcing” God to admit him or her to the world to come, all the while eschewing grace entirely. As some put it, Judaism was a religion of self-salvation. The individual Jew

was filled either with self-righteousness (being confident of having done enough good deeds) or anxiety (being uncertain on that point).

Since the publication of *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, I think that many scholars will now grant that—despite the efforts of Hermann Strack and Paul Billerbeck⁴—one cannot dig that view out of Jewish literature. But here is that very accusation in Paul. Or is it? Paying careful attention to the text, one will discover that Paul does not make that particular charge against Jews in general. Their “fault” lies elsewhere.

These verses seem at first to set up an antithesis. Once Paul says that gentiles had obtained righteousness based on faith, one expects the opposite to be that Israel sought for righteousness by the law and thus did not obtain true righteousness. But what he says is that Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness (not righteousness by law) did not obtain law. This is as close as I can come to a literal reading of verse 31. The translation “did not succeed in fulfilling that law” (NRSV) is imaginative—a guess. The JB has “Israel, looking for a righteousness derived from law, failed to do what that law required.” This is even worse, since it assumes that a “law of righteousness” means “a righteousness based on legal fulfillment,” which is conceivable but not necessarily true. We do not know for sure what “a law of righteousness” is.

The NIV and the NEB try to reduce the problem by deleting “law” in the phrase “did not obtain law” and inserting “it”: Israel “has not attained it” (NIV); “never attained to it” (NEB). In the English sentence (“Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained *it*”), the pronoun must refer back to “a law of righteousness,” and thus this

4. Strack–Billerbeck provide a lot of quotations from Jewish literature, with explanatory remarks. The translations are accurate, but the interpretation often goes astray. See Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 42.

translation manages to get the word *righteousness* into the apparent antithesis of verse 31.

The truth is that 9:31 cannot be translated with any degree of certainty. Besides not knowing what “a law of righteousness” means, or what “obtain law” means, we are not sure that “obtain” or “attain” is the correct translation of the verb *phthanō*. Its first meaning is “come before” or “precede,” but it has numerous other translations.

Douglas Campbell has written a long and compelling paragraph on this verse, of which I shall quote or paraphrase some snippets:

- a “law of righteousness” is a strange phrase
- the verb *phthanō* is “both rare and ambiguous”
- “the usual prepositional phrase denoting an object . . . is not supplied”
- “where we expect *dikaioynē* . . . it is not supplied.”

He continues, “to make matters worse, the verse that follows, 32a, is a difficult verbless clause, a mere juxtaposition of programmatic prepositional phrases . . .”⁵

The point of this long discussion of these verses (9:30–32a) is that Paul’s meaning is not sufficiently clear for anyone to hang anything of weight on the passage. We are not sure of what “a law of righteousness” is, and we do not know what it would mean “to attain law” (if *phthanō* means “attain”).

But even if these uncertainties did not exist, or even if we were certain that the NRSV (for example) is right in translating, “but Israel, who did strive for the righteousness that is based on the law, did not succeed in fulfilling that law,” we *still* should not draw hard conclusions about Paul’s “doctrine of the election and the law,” since we are in the

5. Douglas Campbell, *The Deliverance of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 784.

middle of one of Paul's arguments. To repeat: One of the outstanding errors of those who wish to create theological dogma out of Paul's letters is to pick an appealing sentence or phrase out of the midst of an argument, and rely on that sentence or phrase as providing the core of Paul's thought, while ignoring the conclusion to which Paul himself came. In this case, the larger issue of the status of Israel runs from 9:1 to 11:36, and we are only at 9:30-32. The first subsection on the fault of Israel does not conclude until 10:10.

The difficulty of Rom. 9:30-32a does not leave us in a quandary for long, since things become much clearer in 9:32b-33: "They [Jews] have stumbled over the stumbling stone, as it is written, 'See, I am laying in Zion a stone that will make people stumble . . . and whoever puts his faith in him [or "it"] will not be put to shame.'" The stumbling stone in which (or in whom) people must put their faith is doubtless Christ. Here we have the same point as in 9:24: what is "wrong" with the Jews is that they do not have faith in Christ. We are not told that they are petty legalists, piling up minor acts of obedience to the law in order to save themselves by their own merits. Paul thus far accuses Israel only of lacking faith in Christ.

Paul continues in the same way in 10:1-10. The Jews are zealous (sc. for God or the law), but they are ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God. They seek "*their own* righteousness" instead of God's righteousness. "For Christ is the end of the law, so that there may be righteousness for everyone who faiths" (10:1-4).

"Their own righteousness" is obviously the Jewish sort of rather ordinary righteousness, which requires overall obedience to the law and repentance, supplemented by sacrifice (when possible), to atone for transgressions. God's righteousness here is a *superior* righteousness, and in light of it ordinary Jewish righteousness *does not count*. Moreover, that sort of righteousness has now been brought to

an end. Christ provides the only sort of righteousness that God cares about.⁶

We note that in 10:1–4 Paul introduces the same idea as in Philippians 3. There is another righteousness in addition to “righteousness by faith”: the kind of righteousness that Paul had, to a perfect degree, before his conversion. He does not see that old righteousness as nonexistent, nor does he regard it as wicked, but it is inferior—so inferior that it is worthless.

The realization that in Paul’s view “the righteousness that comes from faith” (also called “the righteousness that comes from God”) is many times *better* than “the righteousness that comes from law” clarifies the “failure” of the Jews. They reject the higher or better or truer righteousness—which is the only one that counts. From their point of view this is not a rejection of God’s *grace*, since in Jewish eyes the covenant was given by the grace of God; it is not a rejection of *faith in God*; it is a rejection of the claim that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God and that people can be saved only through him. They reject that definition of God’s grace. According to Paul’s argument in Rom. 10:1–4, *what is wrong with the Jews is that they are not Christian; what is wrong with Judaism is that it does not accept Christianity.*

Righteousness by works of law, then, is not a charge that each and every Jew is a petty legalist, but that they seek the kind of righteousness that is peculiar to Judaism, which includes obeying the law. This is the very same righteousness that Paul had before his conversion, Jewish righteousness that comes from upholding and living by the Jewish law.

The common misunderstanding of this argument is greatly

6. Cf. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 38: “The contrast with ‘their own’ righteousness, which is available by law, is ‘the righteousness of God,’ apparently ‘true’ righteousness, which has two characteristics: it comes by faith and it is available to *all*.” Their own righteousness is not “self-righteousness, but rather . . . the righteousness that is limited to followers of the law.”

facilitated by the belief that by “works of law” Paul meant “good deeds.” It is possible to conceive that people might try to save themselves by compiling meritorious deeds. But once one grasps that the first “work of the law” is circumcision, and that the phrase “works of law” means simply “obeying the law,” it is impossible to imagine people piling up circumcisions or tripling the number of Sabbath days in order to observe them and accumulate merit. We must always bear in mind that we should not confuse “works of law” with “good deeds.” As argued above, these are two separate categories. “Works of law” are those works that make people Jewish; “good deeds” are “the fruit of the Spirit,” the deeds that Christianity expects. (See above, pp. 457–59.)

In 10:6–10, we see with increasing clarity that Paul has in mind two forms of righteousness—one the standard Jewish righteousness, the other the new righteousness that comes only by faith in Christ. In 10:6–8, “the righteousness that comes from faith says . . . ‘the word is near you, on your lips and in your heart,’ namely, the word of faith that we proclaim.” The righteousness that counts is the gospel that Paul preached, just as in Rom. 1:16–17 the gospel *is* “the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith [sc. in Christ],” and the rejection of Paul’s message is the rejection of the only righteousness that provides salvation.

Paul then adds the closest thing to a creed that he utters: “If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and faith in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (10:9).

In Rom. 10:11–15, Paul begins by repeating the equality of Jew and gentile (10:11–13) and then stresses the communication that is required to persuade people to “call on the name of the Lord” and be saved (10:13). He asks how anyone can call on one whom they have not believed, how anyone can believe without hearing, how they can hear without someone to proclaim, and how anyone can proclaim

unless he is sent (10:14-15). This adds a note of human decision making to a sequence that he previously treated as being entirely by God's predetermination; that is, this is in contrast to 8:29-30: God foreknew, God predestined, God called, he justified, he glorified.

As I have said before, it is typical of the ancient world that people thought that they had free will and also that they were controlled by fate. It took a long time for learned people to decide that free will and predestination are mutually exclusive and cannot both be upheld at the same time. In Paul's day, the two coexisted in the same brain without causing it to explode.⁷

The main point of the passage on proclaiming and hearing, however, is to charge Israel with having heard the gospel ("the word of Christ," 10:17) but rejecting it. For this, Paul once more has recourse to proof texts, in this case from the Psalms, Deuteronomy, and Isaiah. The section concludes with Isa. 65:2, "all day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people" (10:21).

Romans 11: The Question of Israel (Continued)

In 11:1-5, Paul argues that God has not rejected his people because he has chosen to save a remnant. As a proof text he quotes from an exchange between Elijah and God in 1 Kgs. 19:9-18. The conclusion is that God is preserving seven thousand Israelites, "all the knees that have not bowed to Baal," while the rest will perish.

The next verses have served as another proof text (in addition to 9:30-32) to "prove" that in Paul's day Jews were trying to save themselves by legalistic works righteousness. After the quotation from the Elijah story, Paul continues,

So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. But if it is

7. Even the Stoics, famous for belief in predetermination, allowed for freedom of the will. See J. M. Rist, *Stoic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 123, 128-32, 246-50.

by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace would no longer be grace. What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened . . . (11:5-7)

The principal point of these verses is the parallel with the time of Elijah. *God chose* the elect, and the choice was an act of grace. Only the previously elect obtained what they sought—presumably the higher righteousness (faith in Christ) and thus salvation. God’s act in the day of Elijah is a prototype of the present. God chose some people and destroyed the rest. That will happen in the present as well.

But out of this highly deterministic passage one can pull words that put the blame on the Jews’ own behavior. “If it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works” (v. 6).

Ah ha!, the critics of self-righteousness exclaim, the Jews were trying to earn the higher righteousness by works. The main burden of the passage, however, is that most Jews were not chosen by God to obtain faith in Christ.

If Paul had ever argued that what was wrong with Jews (that is, non-Christian Jews) was that they tried to obtain the *superior* righteousness—faith in Christ—by works, it would have been a very bad argument. How could any Jew think that he or she could attain the superior righteousness without believing in Christ, but rather by obeying the law more strictly? The truth is that Jews who sought righteousness by the law were seeking only the sort of righteousness that they believed in, a righteousness that is attained by obedience to the law: they did not have any interest in using the fulfillment of the law to obtain what *Paul* saw as the only righteousness that was salvific. The notion that huge numbers of Jews were trying, trying, trying to obtain Christian righteousness, using means that were inappropriate to the goal, lacks cogency.

But thus far, Paul has not made that argument: that remained to be developed later in Christian history. He argued (1) that Jews declined

to have faith in Christ (9:30-32; 10:1-4) and (2) that God selected only a few Jews to be truly the chosen people (11:5-7).

Romans 11:11-36: The Indirect Benefit (to Gentiles and Jews) of the Jewish Rejection of Jesus as Christ

Thus far we have seen that Paul has trouble in settling on a single explanation of why most Jews have not converted to faith in Christ. He can quote proof texts to show that the prophets rebuked Israel for being “disobedient and contrary” (10:21), and he can state that they reject righteousness by faith in Christ in favor of pursuing their own righteousness, obtained by obedience to the law. That is to say, they persist in not accepting the grace of God revealed in Christ and insist on being loyal to the covenant (9:30-32). Both of these sound like *voluntary* rejections of God’s true plan of salvation, but Paul can also attribute the widespread rejection of God’s gracious act of sending Christ to God’s predetermination (Rom. 8:29-30; 11:5-10).

As a man who loved his own people and who believed in the election, however, he is not content to rule out the vast majority of Jews. In 11:11-12, he states that Israel’s “stumbling” (over the stumbling stone, 9:32) has provided time for the salvation of *gentiles*. This, in turn, will make Israel jealous. He depicts his own role in the salvation of Israel precisely as this: he “glorifies” his own activity in order to make Jews jealous and thus save some of them (11:13-14). When the Jews, stirred by jealousy, begin to come into the new people of God in the last days, the results will be spectacular (11:12, 15).

I shall try to explain “salvation by jealousy.” We begin by recalling one of the prophetic predictions that may help to explain the early Christian missions to gentile lands:⁸ in the “days to come” (the last days), all the gentiles shall stream toward the temple, saying “Come,

8. See above, chap. 17, pp. 468-69.

let us go up to the mountain of the Lord . . . that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths” (Isa. 2:2-3; similarly Mic. 4:1-4). The early Christians thought that they were living in the last days, and therefore it was time to bring the gentiles to the worship of the God of Israel via faith in Christ. (They later disagreed as to whether or not these gentiles should become Jewish.)

In our present passage about jealousy, Paul almost certainly has this picture in mind. His gentile converts, bearing sacrifices (Isa. 56:7) and other gifts (Isa. 60:6, 9), are coming to Mount Zion. At this time, the sacrifices of the gentiles will be acceptable (Isa. 56:7). (Otherwise only Jews could offer sacrifices in the temple.) That Paul has this scene in mind is made certain by Romans 15:16: his collection for Jerusalem and his gentile companions whom he takes with him will constitute an offering that will be *acceptable* in the temple.

Thus Paul is imagining that his trip to deliver the collection to the saints in Jerusalem will prefigure a vast stream of gentiles turning to worship the God of Israel. That would prove beyond doubt that the last days are near. Many Jews will accept this sign and will be jealous lest the gentiles get in ahead of them. This will lead them to put their faith in Christ and join the gentiles who are now worshippers of the one God.

This, one might think, is a bit much to expect of his relatively small financial collection for Jerusalem (small in comparison to the biblical predictions of vast wealth) and the few gentiles whom he is bringing to worship God in Jerusalem. But Paul was an eschatological prophet (among other things), and he expected the approaching change of the world order to begin at any time. A small but signal event might create a large result. Thus he hoped to save at least some Jews because of their jealousy of his successful mission to gentiles.

To summarize: the benefit of Israel’s hardhearted rejection of

Christ was the provision of time for the conversion of gentiles, which in turn would save Jews because of jealousy.

Paul now offers metaphors to explain his view of who gets in and who does not. First he notes that a part can benefit the whole: a lump of holy dough in a large offering of first fruits can sanctify the whole. If a root is holy, the branches are holy (11:15-16). He seizes the metaphor of the branch and runs with it. If some branches of a domestic olive tree are broken off (that is, if some Jews are rejected), shoots of wild olives can be grafted in (gentiles can replace rejected Jews, 11:17). The gentiles, however, must not be boastful: they are supported by the tree (which is Jewish). The graft of the gentiles is based on faith. If they do not have faith (sc. in Christ) they will be rejected (11:18-22). Moreover, it is not too late for unbelieving Jews to come to faith in Christ and be re-grafted into the tree (11:23-24).

Once more, therefore, for the *nth* time in Romans 10-11, the *sole issue is faith in Christ*. Those who have faith are “in”: they will be saved. Those who do not are out and will be destroyed.

Romans 11:25-36: The Surprising Conclusion on the Fate of Israel: All Israel Will Be Saved

Paul has “solved” the problem of the fate of Jews in one sense: if they have faith in Christ they will be saved; if not, not. But his deep lifelong belief in the election of Israel and God’s promises to Abraham will not let him leave it there. And so he springs a surprise:

I want you to understand this mystery: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written, “Out of Zion will come the Deliverer; he will banish ungodliness from Jacob” [Isa. 59:20-21a]. “And this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins [Isa. 27:9].” (Rom. 11:25-27)

The word *mystery* reminds us that Paul had special spiritual gifts that allowed him to “discern all things” (above, p. 260).

In this passage as in 11:13–14, the salvation of gentiles leads to the salvation of Jews. The term “full number of Gentiles” probably refers back to those whom God predestined to be saved (8:29–30). (It seems improbable that Paul has a numerical figure in mind. That remained for the author of the book of Revelation in chaps. 7 and 14.)

When it comes to the Jews, however, he simply says “all Israel.” Naturally some commentators propose that he intended to restrict the number to the “remnant” of Israel (11:5). I do not see any way to come to a firm decision on this point, but the rest of the chapter will help clarify the issue.

Paul now states that the Jews are still elect: “the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (11:28–29). He repeats the argument of 11:11–12: the gentiles (“you”) were originally disobedient to God, but are now the recipients of mercy because the Jews have not converted. But because of gentile conversion, now the Jews will receive mercy (11:31). Then comes this striking conclusion: “For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all” (11:32). This universalist statement goes beyond Gal. 3:22, where he had written, “the scripture has imprisoned all things under the power of sin, so that what was promised through faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who faith.”

This verse, “so that he may be merciful to all,” is the *conclusion* of three chapters: Romans 9–11. The conclusion is not that only those who put their faith in Christ will be saved. It is that God will be merciful to all.

What happened to faith in Christ? Has he suddenly devalued it in favor of universal salvation? A decisive answer cannot be given. I would suggest, however, that if, five minutes after he dictated 11:32, you had asked if one needed to have faith in Christ to be saved, he

would have answered, “yes.” The unexpected conclusion in Romans 11 does not say how God will manage to do it. The redeemer will come and forgive the sins of Jews (11:27). Does this mean that then they will accept Christ? We do not know.

Neither did Paul, as he states directly while marveling at what he thinks God will achieve:

O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! “For who has known the mind of the Lord?” (11:34)

Through most of Romans 9–11, God is a strict, just judge. He has a standard for salvation: one must have faith in Christ. He chooses some and rejects others, which is just, because he is God and can dispense mercy wherever he wishes.

In the final verses of chapter 11, however, I think that we see emergence of a different picture of God: he is the creator who loves his creation and does not intend to lose it. He is omnipotent, and thus he has the power to save all humans. He can even change the rules. Despite the conditions of covenant number 1 (the election of Israel, which required obedience to God’s commands) and covenant number 2 (the sending of Christ to save those who have faith in him), God can save everyone if he wishes. “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen” (11:35).

If God decides to save all those whom he created, he can do it, and all one can say is “Amen.”

Romans 12–13: Ethical Admonitions

Romans 12: “Spiritual Worship” and Advice Reminiscent of 1 Corinthians and of the Teachings of Jesus

From here on in, the explication of what Paul wrote and what he

meant becomes relatively simple—that is, simpler than Paul’s struggles with the law in Romans 7 and his struggle over the fate of Israel in Romans 9–11. Paul is no longer arguing in a way that requires the reader to have knowledge of the contents of the LXX and ancient modes of proof, nor is he facing a conflict between two of his basic beliefs.

As a rule, Paul included a section of admonitions and recommendations in his letters, usually at or near the conclusion. Some of these instructions are very general, some more specific. I shall offer an incomplete list of passages: 1 Cor. 16:2, 10–21; 2 Cor. 13:5, 11–13; Gal. 6:1–10; Phil. 3:1; 4:4–9, 21–23; 1 Thess. 5:12–28.

In Romans 12, he first counsels that his readers should “present their bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (12:1). This is a very interesting verse. The word translated “spiritual” is *logikēn*, from which we derive “logic” and “logical.” The meaning here, however, is “spiritual” (so also the NIV), in the sense of “not physical.” The word *worship*, often translated “service,” is *latreia*, which meant killing animals and offering them to the gods. Animal sacrifice was the chief way in which people “served” or “worshipped” God. The commandment that prohibits idolatry includes the decree, “you shall not bow down to them or *worship* them,” also translated “or *serve* them” (Exod. 20:5). In the LXX this verb (“worship” or “serve”) is *latreuō*, which corresponds to the noun that Paul uses in 12:1, *latreia*. That is to say, the commandment against idolatry was not only that the Israelites should make no “graven images” but that they should not worship or serve idols by sacrificing to them.

As the centuries passed, religion became more individualized and internalized. The outward forms of sacrifice and related activities were kept, but the meaning was *spiritualized* (if that is the right

word). We saw in an earlier chapter that in the view of Jews of Paul's day, a sacrifice of atonement must be accompanied by true repentance and by the rectification of the harm that the transgressor had done.⁹

On a related matter, Philo wrote this: "The symbolical meaning is just this and nothing else: that what is precious in the sight of God is not the number of [sacrificial] victims immolated but the true purity of a *rational* [*logikon*] spirit in him who makes the sacrifice" (*Spec.* 1, 277). Philo used two words, "spirit" and "rational," whereas Paul wrote only one: "rational" (or "reasonable" or "spiritual"). In Paul's case the one word "reasonable" (or "spiritual") conveys the whole idea: the "living sacrifice" that Christians are to present to God is not a literal sacrifice (which would result in a dead animal), but a symbolical or metaphorical sacrifice that is the inner intention. A true sacrifice is offered by the heart and mind. This is a "reasonable," "rational," or "spiritual" sacrifice. This transformation of "sacrifice" to mean "internal commitment" is quite at home in the Jewish Diaspora. In the same way, circumcision could be internalized, as we see in Romans 2:28-29.

Having stressed what is inward, he urges the Romans not to conform to the "world"—the external hustle and bustle, marked by the desires of the flesh—but to be transformed by the "renewing of your minds," that is, by placing them on spiritual matters, so as to discern the will of God (12:2).

Reading Romans 12:4-8 indicates that Paul had not forgotten 1 Corinthians. He replays some of the themes of the Corinthian correspondence: Christians are different "members" of one body, the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-27); God has given these members diverse gifts (1 Cor. 12:1-11; 12:28-31).

9. See above, on *ex opere operato*, pp. 42-48; 625-26.

In Romans 12:14–21, we find ethical advice that is in part reminiscent of the teaching of Jesus. It would be hard to think that Paul knew nothing at all of Jesus’ ethical teaching, and that could be the source. This is especially likely in the case of “bless those who persecute you” (12:14; cf. Matt. 5:44; Luke 6:27). On the other hand, Paul does not have Jesus’ command, “love your enemies” (Matt. 5:44), and he seems to rely only on the LXX for “do not repay evil for evil” (Rom. 12:17; Prov. 20:22; also in 1 Thess. 5:15) and “if your enemies are hungry, feed them . . .” (Rom. 12:20; Prov. 25:21–22).

Romans 13:1–7: Obedience to Rulers

We now come to Romans 13:1–7, one of the most controversial passages in Paul’s letters (though not one of the most difficult to comprehend), a passage that has often been used to suppress, or at least discourage, political revolt, and that was one of the pillars that supported the theory of the “divine right of kings.” This theory was very strong in France and England in the seventeenth century, when people with their ears to the ground heard the rumblings that eventually led to the British Glorious Revolution (1689), the American Revolution (1776), and the French Revolution (1789–98). These were all opposed to tyranny. Tyrannical kings, however, could call Romans 13 in their defense: “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God” (Rom. 13:1).

According to this, in Paul’s day God appointed the high priest Caiaphas and the procurator Pontius Pilate, who agreed that Jesus should die; he appointed Nero (the Roman emperor at the time the letter was written), whose crimes included matricide; later, we must assume, God appointed Hitler and Stalin, who killed people by the millions.

Moreover, because God appointed the authorities, rebellion against

a ruler was rebellion against God, at least indirectly: “Whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who will resist will incur judgment” (13:2).

If anyone is looking for a passage in the Bible that can no longer be literally applied, he or she need look no further. I believe that most readers will be happy that on this point the Founding Fathers of the United States followed John Locke rather than Paul. Locke had argued that if rulers deprived their subjects of their “unalienable rights” (in the words of the Declaration of Independence) it was not only the right but it was the duty of the populace to revolt.¹⁰

The next two verses describe government as Paul saw it:

For rulers are not a terror to good conduct but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval, for it is God’s servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. (Rom. 13:3-4)

If only this idealistic description were so!

The passage continues through verse 7, but I shall not quote the rest. Instead, we should inquire why Paul wrote it. Of course a general statement in favor of law and order is unobjectionable. Anarchy (the lack of rule) is a worse state than the average

10. John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, section 222. See Peter Laslett, ed. *John Locke: Two Treatises of Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 412–14. Locke twice (to my knowledge) commented on Romans 13. He wrote this: “[The ruler] is the minister of God, and executioner or wrath and punishment upon him that doth ill. This being the end of government, and the business of the magistrate, to cherish the good, and punish ill men, it is necessary for you to submit to government, not only in apprehension of the punishment, which disobedience will draw on you, but out of conscience, as a duty required of you by God” (*Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul in The Works of John Locke in Nine Volumes* (London: Rivington, 1824), 7:406); “For the Magistrate’s sword being a terror to *Evil Doers*, and by that terror to enforce Men to observe the *Positive Laws of the Society*, made conformable to the *Laws of Nature for the public good*. . . .” (Locke, *Two Treatises*, 210). He seems not to have noticed that his view on rebellion opposed Paul. Or perhaps he did not want to add rejection of a sentence in Paul to his offenses against the old order.

dictatorship. Laws and obedience to law are essential to all societies. But Paul's enthusiastic and idealistic, or perhaps naïve, description is over the top. He had spent enough time under arrest to know that a governor (for example) did not always get it right when he threw a wandering apostle into prison. Police authorities do not always reward the good and punish the evil (as 13:3–4 claims).

The best explanation of *why* Paul wrote Rom. 13:1–7 is this report in Suetonius's *The Deified Claudius* 25: "Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus," Claudius expelled them, or some of them, from Rome (though the expulsion may not have been long-lasting).¹¹ Claudius was the immediate predecessor of Nero, and so this incident was fairly recent. No one knows precisely what happened, but it is often suggested that an early preacher of Jesus as the Messiah ("Chrestus") may have divided the Jewish community so sharply that the tumult damaged peace and order.

If this explanation is true or even partially true, it is easy to imagine that Paul, when writing to an apparently mixed church in Rome (some Jews, some gentiles) wanted everything to remain calm. He was himself a divisive, polarizing person, and his presence might well stir the passions of non-Christian Jews, who might seek him and other Christian Jews out for verbal confrontation.

A suggestion that seems to me to be less plausible but is nevertheless possible, is that Paul expected his letter to be circulated, and if it fell into the hands of officials, or of enemies of the little congregation of Christians, it would please the Roman government rather than irritate it. This could be called "pandering" to the

11. Claudius was not anti-Jewish; on the contrary, he supported the Jews in various crises. Thus scholars assume that the expulsion was only for the sake of order. Almost nothing is known of this event. For a presentation of probabilities, see Lea Roth, "Claudius," *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, ed. I. Singer (corrected edition; Editors in Chief Cecil Roth, 1966–1970, Geoffrey Wigoder, 1971. Typesetting, printing and binding by Keter Press Enterprises Ltd., Jerusalem, n.d.), 5:599–600.

authorities. Or perhaps he thought that if his presence did spark trouble he could use the letter to show his innocent intentions.

I think that, given his knowledge of Jesus' treatment and his own experience of the justice system, plus his sharp awareness of the suffering of many of his converts because government did not prevent their pagan neighbors from venting their hostility on the Christians, if he had wanted to write a general essay "On Government, Law, and Order," he would not have approved all governmental actions with the degree of enthusiastic approbation shown in Rom. 13:1-7. Thus I believe that there must be a cause or causes in Paul's circumstances or conditions in Rome that explain the unreserved approval of governmental officials and their actions. I think that we shall never know with any precision what the explanation is.

On the other hand, we should emphasize that Paul was socially conservative. He thought that his converts should not challenge social norms or create public disruptions, nor should they draw attention to behavior that would seem odd to others. In view of the imminent return of the Lord and the defeat of all of God's enemies, Paul wanted his converts to live in peace and to let others live in peace:

- Converts should not change their status. Slaves should remain slaves; it is better for the unmarried to remain unmarried. The rationale is that "the appointed time has grown short" and "the present form of this world is passing away" (1 Cor. 7:21-31).
- They should not speak in tongues excessively, since unbelievers will think that they are out of their minds (1 Cor. 14:13-25).
- "Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God." Paul himself tried to "please everyone," since he did not want to do anything that would be a stumbling block to those who might be converted (1 Cor. 10:32-11:1; 2 Cor. 6:3).

As I remarked before, Paul's radical theology—neither Jew nor Greek, neither free nor slave, neither male nor female (Gal. 3:28)—could potentially have very profound social results, but prior to the *eschaton* he did not want his churches to disturb the social order (pp. 294–95). To this degree, his support of judicial and political authority fits into his eschatological thinking. While Christians awaited the return of the Lord, they should not attempt to change the status quo by (for example) campaigning for the freedom of slaves and opposing unjust laws and rulers.

Romans 13:8-14: The Love Commandment (Again) and an Eschatological Admonition

In 13:8–10, Paul returns to the love commandment and repeats what he had written to the Galatians: that “one who loves another has fulfilled the law” (Rom. 13:8). He amplifies on this: “You shall not commit adultery . . .’ and any other commandment are summed up in this word, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (13:9). In Galatians he had written, “For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, ‘You should love your neighbor as yourself’” (Gal. 5:14). The commandments that he lists in Romans 13 are the prohibitions of adultery, murder, theft, and coveting. He tops this off with one more summary: “Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law” (13:10).

Here we see quite clearly that by “works of the law,” which Paul opposes, he does not mean to include the love commandment or any of the other ethical commandments in Scripture. They are in a different category from the “works of law” that distinguish Jew from gentile, especially circumcision, food, and days.¹²

I am always struck by the fact that in these summaries of “the whole

12. See above, pp. 497–98; 513–14; 560–61.

law” that Christians should obey (including 1 Cor. 13), all of the specific points are from the “second table” of the law. He does not say how the summary “Love your neighbor as yourself” “fulfills” the law to worship God and God alone, or the other commandments on the “first table” of the law. “The law” in Paul’s summaries is about how to treat other people.

Was Paul conscious of the fact that he drew a distinction between “works of law” and “fulfilling the commandments?” He repeatedly opposes the notion that “works of law” must be required of Christians and urges Christians to fulfill “the whole law.” I have explained the *de facto* distinction that he made between those parts of the law that separated Jew from gentile in the Diaspora and the ethical commandments that Christians must obey. The distinction is perfectly clear: when he urges Christians to fulfill the law or the whole law, he is clearly omitting the laws that were essential to being Jewish (which I have identified as circumcision, Sabbath and other days, and the laws of *kashrut*). The question is whether or not he himself saw that he was consciously making a distinction between “works of law” and “doing the commandments,” including especially the love commandment.¹³

I am inclined to say that he was not aware that he was putting one set of commandments in one category and a different set of commandments in another category. I think it likely that his mind *naturally* changed categories. When he was discussing membership in the people of God or the body of Christ, he instinctively opposed the laws that would force his converts to become Jewish. When he discussed behavior, he *naturally* fell back on the ethical laws in his Scripture, which did not distinguish Jew from gentile.

13. On the problem of Paul’s rejection of circumcision for his converts while urging them to do “the whole law,” see Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, 96–105. Reading every passage on the law will reveal several difficulties in reconciling Paul’s various statements about the law with one another. I discussed the most important difficulties in the pages just cited.

The final admonition in Romans 13 is eschatological: “You know what time it is . . . salvation is nearer to us than when we first faithed [sc. in Christ] . . . the night is far gone, the day is near” (13:11–12). People therefore should avoid the pleasures of the flesh, such as drunkenness and licentiousness. They should “put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (13:14).

Romans, Part 3: Food and Days

How Much Did Paul Know About the Church at Rome?

Romans 14–16 mostly consist of advice to the Roman Christians about behavior, including diverse topics, such as food laws and how to treat one another. Much of the material seems to reflect information that Paul had received about the Christian congregation in Rome.

That, in fact, is one of the main questions about chapters 14–16: how much did Paul know about the church at Rome? Some scholars are confident that they are able not only to discern what Paul knew but can also describe parties and groups in the church: the “strong” and the “weak”; Jewish converts and gentile converts. I am inclined to doubt that Paul knew *precisely* what was going on in Rome.

One of the reasons is an analogy with Corinth. When Paul was in Ephesus, he received information about the Corinthian church from three sources: a report by “Chloe’s people” (1 Cor. 1:11); a

letter sent by the church (7:1); and a visit from three men: Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (16:17). Yet when he went there he found surprises that made his trip painful (2 Cor. 1:15–2:1). He learned that he had serious opponents, the superlative but false apostles (2 Cor. 11). In this case he had a lot of sources of information, but he still did not know precisely what the main problem was until he met it face-to-face.

Secondly, Paul's response to the news he had from Rome about the "strong" and the "weak," and in particular about the issues of food and Sabbath laws, is rather general and repetitive, and his advice depends in part on previous letters to other churches (as we shall see in detail below). I think that if he had details about the congregation in Rome he would have been more specific.

Doubtless he had some information. I only doubt that he had good enough information to allow us to characterize the church with precision. He knew that there were Jews as well as gentiles in the church (Rom. 2:17; cf. Acts 18:2). There must have been some sort of dispute about food laws and Sabbath observance, the main topic of Romans 14. But it is precisely here that Paul gives very general advice, too general for us to know in detail what the arguments and positions were.

Romans 14:1–15:6: Advice on Food and Days

First we read that the Romans (presumably the "strong" Christians) should welcome those who are *weak* in faith and not quarrel over their differences. Paul immediately names an issue: "some believe in eating anything, while the *weak* eat only vegetables" (14:1-2). After a comment on observing "the day" (see below) he returns to eating: "those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord" (14:6). A few verses later he

comes back to the question of food, asserting that “nothing is unclean in itself” (14:14).

At this point we can be pretty sure in general of what the issue was: the biblical food laws of *kashrut*: what is *kosher*, or “fit,” and what is not. Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 contain numerous food laws concerning what meat Jews may eat.¹ The issue of this is solved by restricting oneself to vegetables, as do “the weak” in 14:2.

Thus it appears that the “weak” avoid transgressing the food laws of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. It follows that the “strong” are willing to eat meat that is forbidden by Jewish law.

In the next verse (14:15), he gives advice that was first crafted in the dispute of “food offered to idols” in 1 Cor. 8:9–13. Let us compare Rom. 14:15 with 1 Cor. 8:8–13.

Rom. 14:15

“If your brother or sister is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. Do not let what you eat *cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died.*”

1 Cor. 8:8–13

“We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. But take care that this liberty . . . does not . . . become a stumbling block to the weak. For if others see you, who possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged . . . to eat food sacrificed to idols? So by your knowledge *those weak believers for whom Christ died are destroyed.*”

This close parallel (and other parallels that could be presented) might seem to indicate that the issue is the same in Rome as in Corinth: food offered to idols. But the intermixture of eating or not eating with keeping or not keeping “the day” (14:5–6), which is very likely the Sabbath, and the mention of “vegetables,” incline one to think that the question of eating is posed by the laws of *kashrut*, which govern all meats, not just idolatrous meats. If Paul had known or had thought

1. See above, on Galatians 2, pp. 485–88. For a fuller summary see E. P. Sanders, *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah* (London: SCM, 1990), 23–28.

that the worship of idols was at issue, he would probably have added a warning against idolatry.

His advice on what to eat and what not to eat is two-pronged. On the one hand, he advises to “live and let live,” not judging other people (14:3–4; 14:10–13a). The rationale is that the food laws are matters of *indifference*, since “nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean” (14:4). This is like his final conclusion on circumcision, where, after all the anger and anxiety of most of Galatians, he says that in and of itself circumcision does not matter (Gal. 5:6). Similarly, with regard to food, he had previously written, “the earth and its fullness are the Lord’s” (1 Cor. 10:26) and “If I partake with thankfulness, why should I be denounced?” (1 Cor. 10:30).

But, on the other hand, he also states that those who are “strong” should not offend or damage those who are “weak.”

- “. . . resolve . . . never to put a stumbling block . . . in the way of another.” (Rom. 14:13)
- “If your brother or sister is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. Do not let what you eat destroy one for whom Christ died.” (14:15)
- “Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God.” (14:20)
- “. . . it is wrong for you to make others fall by what you eat . . .” (14:20)
- “. . . it is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that makes your brother stumble.” (14:21)
- “We who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak . . .” (15:1)

This is very much like 1 Cor. 8:9–13, which we quoted above. The

circumstances, however, are different. In the case of 1 Corinthians 8, the argument was that if a weak person sees a strong person eating meat that had been offered to idols, the weak person might fall into idolatry. In the case of the advice to the Romans not to cause a weak person to stumble, it is not clear into what pit that weak person might fall. Might he or she begin to eat non-kosher meat? If so, would that be so bad, since Paul thinks that eating non-kosher meat is quite all right?

I believe that Paul, not being entirely sure of what the circumstances in Rome were, simply fell back on a previous argument that also concerned food (meat offered to idols), where he put the issue under the category of “love your neighbor.” His advice to love the neighbor is always sound, of course, though in this case it is not clear how the neighbor would be harmed by the eating of non-kosher food.

With regard to “the day,” Paul says this: “Some judge one day to be better than another, but others judge all days to be alike ... Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord” (14:5-6). “The day” here must be the Sabbath, because of the close connection between food and days in this passage and in Jewish life in the Diaspora. It seems that some of the Christians in Rome were observing the Sabbath, while others were not. Paul’s advice was simply that each person should follow his or her own conscience (14:5-6). The admonition not to judge one another, since each would be accountable to God, the true judge (14:10-13a) applies to the Sabbath as well as to food.

If food and days were in dispute in Rome, we should not be surprised, since it was a mixed congregation, as was Antioch, where the question of Jews and gentiles eating together arose. We recall that there were three principal practices that separated Jew from gentile in the Diaspora: circumcision, food laws, and Sabbath laws. Jewish

insistence on these three sets of laws set them apart from gentile society and restricted Jewish-gentile social relations. They could also disrupt the harmony of a Christian congregation.

Paul's view that the issues themselves are "indifferent," both here and in Gal. 5:6, on circumcision, shows that the coming of Christ has *relativized* at least parts of the law: in the big picture they do not matter very much. Up close to such an issue, he can argue extensively about such things, but in the end they do not matter, because *the only things that matter are faith in Christ and the love commandment*. We saw above (chap. 22, pp. 642-43) that he knew the standard Jewish view that the law was an entity and that each part was important. There were main principles (love of God and neighbor), yes, but people should not pick and choose among the commandments of the Jewish law. He used this view in arguing against circumcision. From the point of view of Jews and the false brethren, if gentiles were circumcised they should obey the entire law.

Perhaps it was that very dispute that led Paul to the view that the commandments of the Jewish law did not really matter for Christians in the long run. In Galatians, he added to "faith in Christ" just "faith working through love" (5:6). We have seen that this reappears in Romans 14: "If your brother or sister is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love" (v. 15). "Resolve never to put a stumbling block or a hindrance in the way of another" (v. 13); "Each of us must please our neighbor for the good purpose of building up the neighbor" (15:2); "whatever does not proceed from faith is sin" (14:21).

Paul never entirely broke away from the law, but his view that only faith in Christ, or being in Christ (Phil. 3), plus love, are all that really matters could certainly lead to a decisive break with Judaism.

There is also an overarching view of the world in Romans 14 and the discussion of food offered to idols in 1 Corinthians 10: "the earth

and its fullness are the Lord's" (v. 26). "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31); "everything is indeed clean" (Rom. 14:20). God's creation is good, and quarrels about the food that he provides are petty.

Those who observe the day observe it in honor of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God. . . . If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. (Rom. 14:6-8)

Throughout Romans 14 and the first verses of Romans 15 Paul is trying to foster tolerance, harmony, and good will. His *arguments* are these: (1) Everyone has a conscience, and all should follow their conscience, which is to be judged only by God; (2) live by faith; (3) love your neighbor. Here Paul's arguments are simple and clear, as are his conclusions: the Christians should not judge one another; the strong should put up with the failings of the weak; the only thing that really matters is belonging to the Lord (Rom. 14:8).

A Note on Other Topics in Romans 15-16

I have discussed above the contents of the rest of Romans 15 (the gentiles in God's plan and Paul's own mission to the gentiles) on pp. 104-05. For Romans 16 (his letter of recommendation for Phoebe and the list of people to whom he sends greetings), see pp. 138-40.

Conclusion

Theological Issues in Paul's Thought

Approximately thirty years ago I was invited to give a paper at a small conference honoring Krister Stendahl. The topic was “Was Paul a Theologian?” My contribution, if I remember correctly, was this: Paul’s career was to be the apostle of Christ to the gentiles in the Messianic era. As such, of course, he had numerous theological ideas, and he discussed theological problems. He did not, however, construct a systematic theology like that of, for example, John Calvin. Paul did not start his career with a full set of theological dogmas that he taught to each church. His principal theological discussions derived from events and issues that he faced in converting gentiles and establishing congregations of Christians. Thus, though he thought about theology and discussed it when he needed to do so, the purpose of his career was to save as many people as he could in the time and places where he worked, not to establish a set of dogmas to guide Christian thought for future centuries.¹

This is still my opinion, and here I would like to summarize some of the aspects of Christian theology as he saw them. These *are* summaries, and one will find more detailed discussion in the exegetical chapters.

Since one of my interests in this book was to see if we could discover the growth, development, or evolution of Paul's thought, or some aspects of it, this chapter will concentrate on development. First, however, I must mention two basic topics—theology in the strict sense and Christology—though I have no more to say than I have already said.

Theology

Theology in the strict sense is discussion of or thought (*logos*) about God (*theos*). I shall give a very quick summary of Paul's thought about God. He believed that there was only one God and that this God had called Abraham. He also held that Abraham's descendants—Israelites or, later, Jews—constituted the chosen people, the people whom God would protect and save (even though sometimes he had to punish them). One of God's major acts on behalf of his people was bringing them out of Egypt and to Mount Sinai, where he gave them the law via Moses.

Yet, because of a revelation, Paul also deeply believed that the God of Israel had sent his Son into the world in order to save all people, whether they were Jewish or not. The only thing they had to do was to have faith in Christ, God's Son.

Thus there were two dispensations that did not fit together very

1. My long-standing, often repeated view that Paul did not construct a systematic theology with a full set of dogmas has often been caricatured by accusing me of maintaining that his thought was "incoherent," "irrational," "anti-theological," and the like. I have discussed "systematic," "coherent," and so on in "Did Paul's Theology Develop?" in *The Word Leaps the Gap: Essays on Scripture and Theology in Honor of Richard B. Hays*, eds. J. Ross Wagner et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 325–50.

well. This gave him a huge theological problem, and he struggled mightily with it. It proved to be, however, insoluble (see pp. 605–09; 640–43; 656–57). To get around the problem, at the end of Romans 11 Paul stated a “mystery” that enlarged God’s intention: the inclusion of gentiles would lead to the inclusion of Jews, and thus all people would be saved.

I cannot call a one-time declaration that does not inform any of his correspondence before the end of his last letter his “theology.” I believe that the reader should take the pronouncement of this “mystery” seriously, but it does not explain the other things that he wrote.

Christology

Christology is thought about or discussion of (*logos*) the person and work of Christ. Later Christianity would become obsessed with trying to understand how Christ and God are related and how it is that Christ’s death saves the world. Paul did not probe either issue. His approach was simple: God sent Christ, who was his Son and whose death saved people from sin. From reading Rom. 1:1–6, however, we do not know in what sense Christ was a “son.” Paul’s statement sounds like a theory of adoption: “declared to be Son” (Rom. 1:1–6). The Christ hymn, on the other hand, indicates that Christ was “originally in the form of God,” though he was “born in human likeness” (Phil. 2:6–7). He humbled himself and was obedient to the point of death (Phil. 2:8; see pg. 599).

Christ’s death atoned for sins that had not previously been cleared by atonement or divine punishment (Rom. 1:21–26). Faith in him gives believers eternal life (1 Cor. 15:50–55; Gal. 6:8; Phil. 3:9–11; Rom. 5:8, 17; 6:20–22). Those who die with Christ will live with him. (Rom. 6).

Growth and Development in Paul's Theological Thinking

The simplest way to present the points at which we can see growth and development is to begin with the believer's relationship with the body of Christ. There will then be three more substantial themes to be studied in order to see development clearly: the Spirit, realized eschatology, and suffering.

The Body of Christ

The phrase appears only in 1 Cor. 10:16, 12:27, and Rom. 7:4, but the conception is much broader than this suggests. First we shall consider passages where terms appear that are important for Paul's later idea that Christians become one person with Christ. In the early parts of his correspondence, however, these terms do *not* have the idea of mystical union.

First Corinthians 12:12 states: "You are the body of Christ and individually members of it." The discussion in 1 Cor. 12:12-29 uses the "body of Christ" metaphorically: each part of the Christian congregation is important to the whole community, just as each human body part contributes to the entire person. Collectively the converts add up to one body.

In 1 Cor. 12:13 we find, "For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews and Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit." I do not take "baptized into one body" here to mean "formed a union with Christ." It is more likely that it still means "baptized into the same congregation."

"To drink of one Spirit" leads us to Paul's extended discussion of the Lord's Supper and eating food offered to idols. Yet in Paul's account the words of institution themselves do not point toward mystical union (1 Cor. 11:23-26). They do not emphasize eating the body and drinking the blood of Christ, but rather remembrance and

expectation: “Do this in remembrance of me” (of the bread, 11:24) and “you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (of the cup, 11:26).

It seems to have been the difficult issue of food offered to idols that led Paul to think in terms of the union of individuals not merely with each other in a congregation, but with the Lord himself. In 1 Cor. 10:16–21 he introduces the words *participation* (*koinōnia*) and *participants* (*koinōnoi*). In this context he says that drinking from the cup is participation in the blood of Christ and that eating the bread is participation in the body of Christ (10:16). The members of the congregation are all one body (10:17), but each one individually participates in the body and blood of Christ.

This union is incompatible with participating in pagan gods (10:20–21). Paul had already come to a similar conclusion with regard to the use of prostitutes. A member of the body of Christ must not join his body to that of a prostitute (1 Cor. 6:15–16).

I shall arrange the passages in their sequence in the letter.

6:15–16 Use of prostitutes

10:16–21 The cup, the loaf, food offered to idols

11:23–26 Lord’s Supper; words of institution

12:12–27 Metaphor concerning spiritual gifts

12:13 Through the Spirit, baptized into one body; made to drink of one Spirit

If we ranked them in terms of how strongly they reflect a view of individual union with Christ, I would say that 6:15–16 and 10:16–21 are about equally strong; 11:23–26 and 12:12–27 are quite weak.

First Corinthians 12:13 (“in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body . . . and we were all made to drink of one Spirit”) stands out because of the word *Spirit*. As I indicated above, it is probable that the “one body” is the metaphorical body of Christ—that is, the

Christian community—but it seems that this idea did not lead directly to the theology of participation in Christ. We shall see that the idea of the Spirit, which is *within* each Christian, is more important for the development that concludes with “Christ in the believer, the believer in Christ” (as Adolf Deissmann put it).²

On the basis of the evidence of 1 Corinthians we cannot say that a theology of the union of each individual convert with Christ is building up momentum. Paul employs it when it is useful—as it is in the cases of prostitution and idolatry. At this point I would not say that Paul’s view of how salvation works is that individuals are in Christ in a mystical (rather than metaphorical) sense. (For fuller discussion of these passages, see pg. 428–32.)

The Spirit in 1 Thessalonians and the Corinthian Correspondence

In 1 Thessalonians, the Spirit is the supernatural being that enters the lives and hearts of individual Christians: they have the Spirit, and some of them could prophesy (1 Thess. 5:19–20).

In 1 Corinthians, we see the same theme amplified: there are lots of gifts of the Spirit, and each Christian has at least one (1 Cor. 12–14). The Spirit also plays a role in 2 Corinthians. Christians have the Spirit in their hearts as a “first installment” (NRSV) or as a deposit, which guarantees (or *proves*) what is to come (NIV; 2 Cor. 1:22; similarly 5:5).

Second Corinthians 3 is a major discussion of the Spirit. The “ministry of the Spirit” is contrasted with the ministry of Moses, which is a “ministry of death” (2 Cor. 3:7). The Spirit “gives life” (3:6). Paul states that it is the Spirit that allows Christians truly to understand the “old covenant” (the Old Testament). In 2 Corinthians 3:13–16, Paul argues that the veil that Moses put over his face when

2. Adolf Deissmann, *St. Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History*, trans. W. E. Wilson, 2nd ed. (New York: Doran, 1926), 135; see above, pp. 613; 663 n. 21.

he received the commandments from God is removed when one turns to “the Lord” (3:16, partially paraphrasing Exod. 34:34). He then adds that “the Lord” (in Exod. 34:34) “is the Spirit” (3:17). He continues by saying that the present transformation of Christians into the image of the Lord “comes from the Lord, the Spirit” (3:18). (Above, pp. 409–13; 605–09.)

It is sometimes difficult to know when by “the Lord” Paul means God and when he means Christ. In either case, the equation of “the Spirit” with “the Lord,” and the attribution to the Spirit of life-giving power and the transformation of Christians (3:6, 18), show the increasing importance of the Spirit in Paul’s thought. These powers of the Spirit are greater and more important than the “spiritual gifts” of prophesying, healing, speaking in tongues, and the like.

The Spirit in Galatians and Romans

In Gal. 3:2–5, Paul assumes that the Galatians believe that they have the Spirit, which produces miracles. This is *proof* that they really were converted to faith in Christ and that they do not need to add “works of law” such as circumcision, food laws, and Sabbath law.

Galatians 4:6 takes the important step of using the Spirit in combination with the statement that Christians are sons (children) of God, and if sons then also “heirs.”³ This time the Spirit is specified as the Spirit *of God’s Son*. Paul implies, but does not yet say explicitly, that Christians, who have Christ’s Spirit, are *joint* heirs or *co-heirs* with Christ; they have “*sonship*” (Gal. 4:5–7). This is a long way from saying, “you have the Spirit and therefore can speak in tongues, and so on.” Combining possession of the Spirit with the conception of “sonship” is very close to saying that Christians are one with Christ. This is a much more profound conception of the Spirit than

3. On the use of “sons” instead of the now-preferred “children,” see above, pp. 520; 540–41.

appears in 1 Thessalonians (the Spirit is proof of conversion) and 1 Corinthians (the Spirit bestows gifts on each Christian.)

“Living by the Spirit” is opposed to gratifying “the desire of the flesh” (here presumably human pleasures), and it produces good deeds, which are also more important than showy gifts (Gal. 5:16—6:10).

In Rom. 5:5 Christians’ hopes are not disappointed, because “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.” The Spirit is a conduit through which God can affect the interior life of Christians. This passage is also another instance of the Spirit as providing *proof* of conversion or of the new Christian life.

In Rom. 7:6 and throughout Romans 8, the Spirit provides life and freedom from Sin, death, and the law. The Spirit of life and freedom is the Spirit of God (8:9, 11) or the Spirit of Christ (8:9, 10, 14). This Spirit dwells in Christians (8:9, 11). In fact, *Christ is in Christians* (8:10). Paul can reverse the formulation: Christians are “in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in [them]” (8:9). The indwelling is mutual.

We might say that the view that Christians are in union with Christ was facilitated by the Spirit, which is always inner. It may be that Paul had to think that the Spirit of Christ was in the believer before he could say that Christians are “in Christ.”

As in Gal. 4:5, 7, Christians receive “the Spirit of sonship” in Romans 8 (*hyiothesia*, 8:15).⁴ The Spirit “witnesses with our spirit that we are the children of God” (8:16).⁵ This time Paul completes the thought: “if children then heirs, heirs of God and *joint* heirs with Christ” (8:17). The Spirit’s “witness” that Christians are children of God gives the Spirit its usual role of being the *proof* of true conversion, this time giving them the status of the children of God.

4. The NRSV has “spirit of adoption”; the NIV correctly has “Spirit of sonship.”

5. In Rom. 8:16, 17, and 21 Paul uses “children” (Greek *tekna*) rather than “sons.”

This is not a full account of the use of the word *Spirit* in Paul's letters, but I think that we have seen enough to establish the great role of the Spirit in Paul's thought about participation: the Christian is in Christ, Christ is in the Christian. The Spirit eases the way toward this formula. Its basic place (if one may put it this way) is inside a person. At first it gives each person special gifts, and then it guarantees the effectiveness of conversion; but by the end of Romans 8, the Spirit provides for the union of Christians with Christ and establishes the status of Christians as "sons of God, joint heirs with Christ."

I wanted to keep the discussion of the Spirit in one place, and so I did not interrupt this account by taking notice of a somewhat different development in Galatians. Chronologically, Paul had achieved a description of the union of believers with Christ before he wrote Romans. In chronological sequence, between the sections "The Spirit: 1 Thessalonians; Corinthian Correspondence" and "The Spirit in Galatians and Romans" we should insert Gal. 3:26-27, where he more directly states the union of believers with the Lord, without introducing the Spirit as a kind of mediator. I believe, however, that his discussion of the Spirit in the Corinthian correspondence helped push him toward the conclusion of his grand argument in Galatians:

[I]n Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith. As many of you were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Gal. 3:26-28)

Realized Eschatology

Paul's eschatological expectation—that the Lord would soon return and that there would be a final judgment—is the same in Paul's last letters (Philippians and Romans) as in his first letter (1 Thessalonians; e.g., Phil. 3:20-21; Rom. 13:11-12), and in this sense it did not

“change” (above, pp. 428–31). On the other hand, as the years went on and the Lord did not return, the converts needed something more than just the determination to wait in a state of blamelessness. It may have been this problem that led to Paul’s statement of “realized eschatology,” the introduction into the present of the glory that he expected at the end.

Here I have nothing to add to chapter fifteen, pp. 408–18, which is the discussion of 2 Cor. 3:18–5:10. Paul temporarily maintained that in the present Christians were being transformed into the likeness of Christ. “All of us . . . are being transformed into the same image [as that of the Lord or Spirit, v. 17] from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.”

He abandoned this suggestion and returned to his eschatological view as stated in 1 Corinthians 15: Christians would be transformed at once, “in the twinkling of the eye.” *But* the idea of inner transformation in the present survived in another form: the life-giving Spirit of Christ within each Christian.

Relationship between the Spirit and Suffering

Suffering is a major topic in Paul’s first surviving letter, 1 Thessalonians. The pagan gentiles of Thessalonica were persecuting Paul’s converts, and Paul feared that their faith might be shaken. To help them bear their troubles, he points out that it was in persecution that they “received the word with joy.” This made them imitators of Paul himself and of the Lord (1 Thess. 1:6). Later in the letter he reminds them they were also thereby imitating the Christians in Jerusalem and some of the prophets (2:14–15). He urged them to keep their faith, hang on, be blameless, and wait (3:8–13).

The idea of suffering is not a major theme in 1 Corinthians,⁶ but it

6. *Thlipsis*, “affliction” appears only in 1 Cor. 7:28, where Paul wishes to spare his converts the tribulation that comes with marriage; *pathēma*, “suffering,” does not appear at all.

is very prominent in 2 Corinthians. Paul's own sufferings feature in part of his harsh letter, 2 Cor. 11:23–29 (“far more imprisonments,” “countless floggings,” and so on, discussed in connection with “boasting in weakness,” above, pp. 252–53). Suffering is also very much on his mind in the letter of relief, 2 Corinthians 1–9. He offers other lists of his own sufferings in 2 Cor. 6:4–5 (e.g., calamities and beatings) and 2 Cor. 4:8–11 (discussed below). He does not hesitate to say that the Corinthians had caused him to suffer (2:4; probably also 7:5). In the chapters on money, he mentions that the Macedonians had contributed to the collection for Jerusalem during “a severe ordeal of affliction” (8:2).

The letter of relief (2 Cor. 1–9) opens with a reflection on suffering:

[God] consoles us in all our affliction [*thlipsis*], so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God. For just as the sufferings [*pathēmata*] of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ. If we are being afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation; if we are being consoled, it is for your consolation, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we are also suffering. Our hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share [*koinōnoi*, lit., as you are sharers] in our sufferings, so also you share in our consolation. (2 Cor. 1:4–7)

We do not know whether or not Paul had had any different sorts of suffering recently, and so we do not know what he specifically had in mind. These verses may be only a reflection of his general views about suffering: Christ suffered, Paul suffered in diverse ways, and his converts suffered. This passage does *not* say that Paul and the Corinthians share Christ's sufferings, but only that his sufferings do “us” (probably here Paul and his companions) good: they are abundant *for* us, more literally *unto* us (1:5). But Paul plays a Christlike

role for the Corinthians. He is afflicted *for* them (literally, “on your behalf”). They also share his sufferings, which means that they share his consolation.

In 2 Corinthians 4 in particular, the idea of *union* with Christ through suffering becomes more pronounced. Interestingly enough, in this chapter he partially drops his usual ways of referring to Christ—Christ Jesus, Jesus Christ, the Lord Jesus Christ, and so on—in favor of the simple “Jesus.” “Jesus” was the man’s name: he was Jesus of Nazareth. “Christ” and “Lord” are both titles. “Christ” means anointed (the Greek *Christos* translating the Hebrew *Mesiah*). Paul frequently uses “Jesus Christ” and “Christ Jesus” as if both words are names, and he also frequently attaches “Lord” as a title, which makes “Jesus” in 4:8–11 and 4:14 stand out:⁷

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed . . . persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. (2 Cor. 4:8–11)

“[We] know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence.” (2 Cor. 4:14)

Thus Paul’s use of “Jesus” alone sometimes indicates that he has in mind the story of Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection. It is as if he wanted to emphasize his own personal connection, through suffering, with the sufferings experienced by the man Jesus, before God raised him and made him Lord and Christ (Rom. 1:1–4).

7. A quick count (without studying the numerous manuscript variants) indicates that Paul uses the word *Jesus* 143 times in the seven undisputed letters. In only eight verses does “Jesus” stand alone, without either “Christ” or “Lord” anywhere in the verse. In these eight verses, “Jesus” is used eleven times. Four of these eleven are in 2 Corinthians 4. Another refers to Jesus’ death (1 Thess. 4:14), and one refers to his “marks” (*stigmata*, Gal. 6:17). “Carrying in our body the death of Jesus” in 2 Cor. 4:4 is especially close to Gal. 6:17, “I bear the stigmata of Jesus.”

“We,” in 2 Corinthians 4, is Paul himself (and possibly his companions), whom he contrasts with the Corinthians (“you,” “your,” 4:14–15). Thus 2 Cor. 4:8–11 is a very special claim to be the bearer of the life and death of Jesus. Paul and Jesus are in some sense one.

We have now seen that Christians in general participate in the body of Christ, as in 1 Cor. 10:14–21; 6:15, and also that Paul expected all Christians to suffer in *imitation* of Christ (1 Thess. 2:14). In 2 Cor. 4:11, Paul combines his own sufferings with the idea of union with Christ. *Bearing* Jesus’ death through sufferings is different from *imitating* Jesus by suffering: it is the difference between copying actions and sharing them. More precisely, the action—suffering, in this case—is the same, but the nuance is different. Sharing and participating in the life, suffering, and death of Jesus is spiritually warmer, more enriching, more powerful, and more profound than merely experiencing events that are similar to his (imitating him).

Although in 2 Corinthians 4 only Paul’s suffering is interpreted as sharing the death of Jesus, just as previously it was only “we” (Paul and perhaps his companions) who shared Christ’s weakness, including especially his crucifixion (2 Cor. 13:4), the conception of sharing Christ’s sufferings can be expanded to include all Christians. After all, the Corinthians experienced the same suffering as did Paul (2 Cor. 1:6). Moreover, the Corinthians are participants in Paul’s suffering (1:7). So why should their sufferings not also be a sharing of the sufferings of Jesus?

Paul, of course, makes the connection: We (including his converts) are “children of God,” “joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him” (Rom. 8:17).

These two almost omnipresent themes in Paul—Christians have the Spirit and they suffer—cannot be intimately related to each other. It would not make sense to say that “we suffer with the Spirit,” whereas

the idea of suffering with Jesus is possible and meaningful. The Spirit does not suffer, but Jesus did, as do Christians, and suffering becomes one of the important ways in which Christians can share the life of the one whom they worship.

Conclusions Regarding the Growth or Development of Paul's Theology

I see the developments that we are discussing as organic growth. I do not see "change" of the sort that requires retraction. Even eschatology does not *change*, since after introducing transformation in the present as an idea, Paul reverts to transformation all at once, at the *parousia*.

But the role of the Spirit does change in the sense of *growing*. From what Paul says about the Spirit in 1 Thessalonians and 1 Cor. 12:4-11, one could not predict what he says in Romans 8, where the Spirit becomes the Spirit of Christ within each Christian, which frees the convert from Sin and Death.

Suffering develops: it goes from imitation of Paul and Christ to sharing their sufferings, so that Christians are in union with Christ. Being a member of the body of Christ evolves from being a metaphor for being in the Christian community to participating in his suffering and death, becoming one person with him, and becoming a son of God, a joint heir with Christ.

In order to focus on the main themes that "grow," I left out some important passages that show the importance of union with Christ. The most significant of these is Rom. 6:3-11: "all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death. . . . If we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. . . . So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."

From the interweaving of the Spirit, the body of Christ, sharing his

sufferings, and dying with him, Paul creates an entire soteriology that is based on the idea of participation. The word itself comes from his discussion of the Lord's Supper and meat offered to idols.

I have sometimes guessed that sharing Christ's body and blood in the Eucharist all by itself might have led to something like Paul's ideal of Christians being one with Christ. But we need not speculate. Paul's thought was impelled in that direction by other factors.

The growth of the role of the Spirit, the interpretation of suffering as sharing rather than imitating, being one with Christ (rather than one with other members of the Christian community), and Paul's brief excursion into realized eschatology all have one result: the enrichment of the inner, spiritual life of Christians.

I suggested various reasons or motives for this development: (1) The Corinthians wanted a bigger "payoff" in the present. Paul's discussion of *charismata*, or "gifts of the Spirit" in 1 Corinthians 12–14 leads to the view that they were very fond of their gifts. Paul discouraged excessive and disorderly use of the showiest gifts (esp. speaking in tongues), but he may have wanted to find better ways of enhancing their spiritual lives. (2) Possibly the thought of his own death led him to see their point: lying in the grave waiting was a grim prospect and may have led to a grim present—suffer while waiting. Surely there is more to the Christian life in the present than that! (3) The above point is of course connected to the problem of the delay of the *parousia*. Paul could not do anything about that, but he might make the present more meaningful.

"I suggest" is weaker than "I propose." Motives and reasons must be inferred from explicit statements, and inferences can go awry. I think that we can say definitely that Paul's conception of the inner life of Christians *grew*. It is less certain why this happened.

Righteousness by faith, the language of which has to do with law courts, guilt, and innocence, does not fit naturally into the

soteriology that I have just described. Paul created the phrase in responding to the Galatian crisis: his opponents pointed to Abraham to prove the need for circumcision, and Paul reinterpreted the Abraham story by combining three words from biblical passages about Abraham: “righteousness,” “faith,” and “gentiles.” This gave him the formula that “gentiles are righteous by faith” (and do not need to be circumcised). His use of the passive verb, “to be righteousness” (*dikaiōthēnai*), forces “righteousness by faith” into being another term for the transfer of converts to Christianity. It is a synonymous parallel to “being in Christ Jesus” and thus being a son of God (Gal. 3:24–26; Rom. 6:7).⁸ The language is not really suitable for this new meaning, but Paul makes the two synonymous anyway.

“Righteousness by faith and not by works of the law” was vitally important after the Galatian crisis. Unlike “you are all one person in Christ,” righteousness by faith was a polemical formulation, allowing him to oppose his view (summarized as “faith in Christ”) to that of his adversaries (summarized as “works of law”). It was thus highly useful against those who wanted to require Jewishness in addition to faith in Christ. *Sola fide*, “by faith alone,” was, as Lutheran theology has always insisted, crucially important in Paul’s view of Christianity. I think that the most telling single sentence is Gal. 2:21, “if righteousness could be gained by the law, Christ died for nothing.”

In Romans 9 and 10, Paul employs “righteousness by faith” to great effect in arguing that gentiles have faith in Christ, and thus are in the people of God, whereas most Jews have not put their faith in Christ and have thereby excluded themselves. At this point in his discussion of the fate of Jews, he is arguing that “not all who are descended from Israel are Israel” and that many Jews are not Abraham’s offspring (Rom. 9:6–9). The reader might wish to

8. Romans 6:7 is literally “righteoused from Sin.” This is invisible in translations. See above, pp. 636–37.

reconsider this point in light of Rom. 11:25–32, but in chapter 9 Paul wanted to reduce the number of the elect.

“Being one person with Christ” arises organically in Paul’s thought, apparently beginning with the passage on the body of Christ in 1 Cor. 6:15. (See above, pp. 304–05.) “Righteousness by faith and not by law” comes as a bolt out of the blue in Galatians. But, as we have seen, the two are merged or equated in the conclusion to Galatians 3 and in Philippians 3:7–11.

A Final Puzzle

I wish to take up a question that people often ask. The question springs from a paragraph in *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*. The issue is just as important for the present book as it was for the earlier one.

I objected to Rudolph Bultmann’s interpretation of the participatory aspects of Paul’s thought, which basically made them disappear. They were interpreted in terms of existentialism (a then-popular philosophy). Paul’s saying that Christians are in Christ (and the like) was, Bultmann proposed, an “existential demand” that “require[d] a decision” and that challenged the believer’s self-understanding.

I argued that, whatever the usefulness of translating Paul into the latest philosophical thought, we should accept that he meant what he said. “The Spirit that works miracles and produces *charismata* is not simply ‘the word of grace’. Being one body and Spirit with Christ is not simply living out of a revised self-understanding, although that may also result. . . .” We should “understand Paul as saying what he meant and meaning what he said. Christians really are one body and Spirit with Christ, the form of the present world really is passing away, Christians really are being changed . . . the end really will come and those are in Christ will really be transformed.”⁹

But then I had to ask, “What does it mean?” How can we make sense of this today? I suggested that “We seem to lack a category of ‘reality’—real participation in Christ, real possession of the Spirit—which lies between naïve cosmological speculation and belief in magical transference on the one hand and a revised self-understanding on the other.”

And then the final admission: “I do not have a new category of perception to propose here. This does not mean, however, that Paul did not have one.”¹⁰ As Rebecca Gray reminded me, Paul lived in a mental universe that is quite different from ours. People then saw the world through different eyes, and Paul’s converts probably understood what he meant by becoming one person in Christ.

Moreover, we must remind ourselves that Paul had mystical experiences. He was caught up into Paradise; he heard things that “no mortal is permitted to repeat” (2 Cor. 12:1–4). When he says, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me” (Gal. 2:20), he is making a statement of mystical union, unmediated by verbal argument and thought, imperceptible to the senses.

I still wonder, however, how other people, less mystically inclined than Paul, appropriated and continue to appropriate a union that the senses cannot perceive but that is nevertheless “real.” I must leave this to others; happily, there *are* others.

In a book published in 2008, two of the leading New Testament scholars addressed the question of a different category of reality.¹¹ Richard B. Hays wrote “What is ‘Real Participation in Christ’? A

9. E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 522.

10. *Ibid.*, 522–23.

11. *Redefining First-Century Jewish and Christian Identities: Essays in Honor of Ed Parish Sanders*, ed. Fabian Udoh with Susannah Heschel, Mark Chancey, and Gregory Tatum (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008).

Dialogue with E. P. Sanders on Pauline Soteriology,” and Stanley K. Stowers contributed “What is ‘Pauline Participation in Christ?’”¹²

I recommend that everyone who is interested in the thought processes and conceptions that made sense to Paul and others in the ancient world read these two essays. I certainly learned from them. Because of the circumstance in which the essays were written (see n. 11), it would not become me to evaluate them or comment on them (except to say, many thanks!). I think that they should be widely read.

12. Ibid., 336–51 and 352–71, respectively.

Appendix I: Homosexual Practices in Greece and Rome

Introduction

In chapter 12, I indicated that understanding how Greeks and Romans viewed homosexual activity is important for understanding the views of Paul and other Jews in the Greek-speaking Diaspora. Here I wish to provide a more focused and nuanced portrayal of our topic—one seen more through the eyes of Greeks and Romans, not through the eyes of Greek-speaking Jews. I shall provide a closer description of classical Athens and pre-Hellenistic Rome, offer a few comments on female involvement in same-sex relations, and conclude with a brief and partial survey of the opinions of Greek and Roman philosophers.

It would be helpful to reread the large generalizations in chapter 12, pp. 346–68. Briefly: the categories of the ancient world were “active” and “passive”; sexual relations between two people of the same sex were not condemned; free adult men should penetrate but not be penetrated; it was considered natural for a male to desire both female and male partners.

This is not a full study of everything there is to know about sex in the ancient world. A full study of homosexual activity in the Greco-

Roman world would range over twelve centuries (from the sixth century BCE to the sixth century CE), various social and economic classes, and a large geographical area (from Constantinople [now Istanbul] to Rome, then north to Britain). It would also explore both male and female homosexual activity.

That our present discussion must be limited in terms of time and space is obvious, but the need largely to ignore female homosexual relations requires explanation. With the exception of Sappho's poems, which survive only in fragments, all of the literary information about sex comes from males and most of it is about males. There is some visual evidence of sexual activity between females, and we may be sure that it existed, but we do not have verbal accounts from women that would indicate how they viewed homosexual acts.

The Athenian Ideal

We first turn to classical Athens, that is, Athens between approximately 480 BCE (the second defeat of an invading Persian army) and 350 BCE (the approximate time of the establishment of Macedonian hegemony over Greece). This is the culture that is widely admired as perhaps the finest that ever existed: Athens during this period was the city of the philosophers Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle (though Aristotle was a native of Macedonia); of the orator and statesman Demosthenes; of the dramatists Aeschylus, Aristophanes, Euripides, and Sophocles; and of the historians Thucydides and Xenophon (Herodotus was not an Athenian). A kind of homosexuality was central to the education of the young elite males in this glittering culture.¹

The Athenians, along with other Greeks and Romans, thought that it was natural for males to desire males; in Athens, they thought that

1. See K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 3. Dover's book is the main source of the discussion of "the Athenian Ideal."

it was natural for grown men to desire boys. The adult male “lover” (*erastēs*, plural *erastai*) admired, followed, and desired a boy, called “the beloved” (*erōmenos*, plural *erōmenoi*); both the Greek words are derived from *eros*, physical love or desire. The boys, at least while they were still young—probably under twelve—were protected by slaves who accompanied them to and from school. We assume that the boys’ fathers (like the parents of teenage girls today) were pleased if their offspring drew admirers but did not want them to be corrupted, thus the guardians. The social rules required the *erastai* (adult lovers) to engage the boys in conversation, to help with their education and training, and to desire them sexually.

The *erastai* attended the gymnasium, where the boys exercised nude, but they were expected to keep their distance. The boys were doubtless sometimes flirtatious, but their part in this elaborate cultural enterprise was to be chaste though friendly. If a nude boy sat in the sand while in the gymnasium, he should, if properly modest and chaste, eradicate the imprint of his private parts when he stood up, so as not to tempt his *erastes* or *erastai* to touch the spot with lustful thoughts.²

The *eromenoi* (the beloved boys) should admire, respect, and like their suitors: the appropriate feeling was *philos*, friendly love.³ This should be maintained throughout the relationship, which might last for several years. When an *eromenos* reached the age of discretion, probably about twelve or thirteen,⁴ but possibly later, the *erastes* might make physical overtures. A lot of vase paintings show adult men courting youths; in many cases the youth is physically larger

2. Ibid., 124–25.

3. Ibid., 53.

4. The sources do not specify how old a boy should be before being directly propositioned; for various indications of age, see *ibid.*, 49, 86, 98, 144, 172, 197; note “the right age” on p. 80. Eva Cantarella (*Bisexuality in the Ancient World* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992]) estimates the ages appropriate to each stage on pp. 28–34, 36–42.

than the man, which implies that he was a few years past puberty.⁵ Or possibly it was artistically attractive to present the youths as large, strong, and athletic. In any case, the early or middle teenage years were the time when the man might honorably “make his move.” The youth might respond positively, but one form of the ideal held that he should accept intercourse only between his thighs, with no penetration. If the boy did accept anal penetration, he should not enjoy it.⁶ Males should not learn to *like* being passive.

Being an *eromenos* was part of a male’s education and of his growth into manhood. His attitude toward sex with his *erastes*, however, should be that attributed to Victorian ladies when they engaged in sex with their husbands; duty and friendship may oblige activities that bring no actual pleasure to the recipient: “close your eyes and think of England.”

Constancy on the part of the suitor was important. If a man remained in love with a boy for a long period of time, as demonstrated by a patient courtship that lasted a few years, the boy would feel that the man could be trusted, and he would probably be more inclined to yield.⁷

In time, both lover and beloved should grow out of this relationship. The *erastes* should marry and sire children, the younger man (perhaps at eighteen) should begin to admire boys. He, in turn, would follow his beloved for some years, but also move on to matrimony and fatherhood.⁸

The Athenians seem not to have entertained the thought that homosexual love might be reciprocal, with the partners exchanging

5. There is a large collection of pictures of Greek vases in Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, pp. 118–119).

6. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, 36 n. 18, 52f., 97.

7. *Ibid.*, 89, 108, and elsewhere.

8. On the stages of male life, see *ibid.*, 86–87; Cantarella, *Bisexuality in the Ancient World*, 28–34, 36–42.

roles. The younger *eromenos* must always be the passive partner, the older *erastes* always active.⁹ K. J. Dover points out that at the age of transition from *eromenos* to *erastes* a young man might fulfill both roles, but with different people, being the “beloved” of an older male, but the “lover” of a younger male.¹⁰

I am leaving out many of the nuances that one will find in Dover’s *Greek Homosexuality*, which is a splendid work of historical scholarship, one that clearly but subtly explains the large body of sometimes difficult evidence. But I think that I have given a pretty fair sketch of the main lines of the Athenian ideal, as uncovered by Dover and other scholars. The pursuit of boys was as stylized as was the pursuit of teenage girls by boys when I was young, replete with social conventions. The pursued young person should be neither “easy,” nor too flirtatious, nor lustful. The pursuer should be discrete, kind, helpful, and thoughtful, though also persistent and full of desire.

Real life does not always follow ideal prescriptions, and so we should ask what really happened.¹¹ As Dover reminds us, we cannot go behind the closed doors of Athenian bedrooms.¹² I shall offer some guesses, which I hope are vague, general, obvious, and correct: some boys did not enjoy the game all that much and tolerated it only to the degree that was socially necessary; some loved being pursued but were not willing to go beyond intercourse between their thighs; some accepted penetration but did not care for it and grew out of the relationship after a short period; others accepted it, liked it, and found it difficult to give up.

With regard to the *erastai*, some played the game with relatively little enthusiasm, some were dead keen; some did not insist on actual

9. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, 16, 86f.; Cantarella, *Bisexuality in the Ancient World*, 46.

10. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, 87.

11. *Ibid.*, 81; Cantarella, *Bisexuality in the Ancient World*, 41.

12. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, 53–54, 57.

sexual relations, some were quite insistent; some cheerfully turned from pursuing boys to marriage, others strongly preferred boys and married only because society imposed marriage on them.¹³

The social and economic conditions in which these conventions flourished require emphasis:¹⁴ these were the rules of the elite, of boys whose parents had slaves, of young men who had time to follow boys about and idle their time away watching them exercise. We are also considering a social system in which women of good families were sequestered. Men pursued boys, in part, because they could not pursue girls or women of their own class, who were completely protected by their parents. Marriages were arranged, and women when married were as protected by husband and slaves as they had been by parents and slaves when they were girls. Therefore men could experience the thrill of the chase only if they pursued boys. Prostitutes, both male and female, were available to these men;¹⁵ we are not, however, discussing mere sexual relief, but rather a romantic courtship that was idealized and beautified by artists and philosophers—including Socrates and Plato.¹⁶

As already noted, what was completely against the rules was for an adult male to be passive sexually. It seems to be the case that if an adult male did go from male lover to male lover, he would be regarded not only as promiscuous, but also as a prostitute. Since men should not be the passive recipients of sexual activity, and since they were not

13. Aristophanes in Plato, *Symposium* 192a-b: Some males “have no natural inclination to marry and beget children. Indeed, they only do so in deference to the usage of society, for they would just as soon renounce marriage altogether and spend their lives with one another.” For the fuller context of this passage, see below, pp. 741–42 notes 42, 43.

14. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, 88, 149–50.

15. Male prostitutes were presumably not Athenian citizens; see *ibid.*, 32.

16. The Platonic dialogues present different views, partly because they put various opinions in the mouths of different speakers, partly because Plato himself seems to have changed his mind on sexual activity. In the following brief summary, I shall have to leave these complexities out of consideration. See Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, esp. pp. 11–13, 81–86, 153–68; on restriction of sex to activity that could lead to conception, see below, pp. 742–43.

supposed to enjoy this role, if they did in fact allow themselves to be used sexually by various men, many would think that they must have been motivated by desire for profit.¹⁷ Dover puts it this way:

[I]n what circumstances does a male in fact submit to anal penetration by another male, and how does society regard his submission? There seems little doubt that in Greek eyes the male who breaks the “rules” of legitimate *eros* detaches himself from the ranks of male citizenry and classifies himself with women and foreigners; the prostitute is assumed to have broken the rules simply because his economic dependence on clients forces him to do what they want him to do; and conversely, any male believed to have done whatever his senior homosexual partner(s) wanted him to do is assumed to have prostituted himself.¹⁸

It was against the law for a man in this situation—one who, as an adult, had continued in the passive role, and who therefore could be considered to have prostituted himself—to carry out the duties of Athenian citizenship. A lot of the evidence about Athenian homosexual mores comes from the trial of a man who took a prominent part in political life but who was accused of being a male courtesan or prostitute.¹⁹

Women who depended on sex for a livelihood fell into separate categories: a woman who was a courtesan was a “kept” woman, not a common prostitute; but a male who depended on financial support from a male could only be a prostitute—a classification that forbade him to exercise the rights of a citizen.

In this trial, the accused was an ally of Demosthenes named Timarchus, who had joined Demosthenes in bringing charges against one Aeschines because of dissatisfaction with a peace treaty with

17. In classical Athens, the alternatives to desire for money as the explanation of adult male sexual passivity were physical defect (of the anus, see Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, 169–70) or the moral perversion of insatiable lust (Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, 103, 170). On men who enjoyed anal penetration, see further below, pp. 732–33.

18. *Ibid.*, 103.

19. On the trial, see Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, chap. 2; for courtesans and prostitutes, pp. 20–22.

Philip of Macedon that Aeschines and others had negotiated. Faced with the charges brought by Demosthenes and Timarchus, Aeschines countersued (we would now say) by charging Timarchus with having prostituted himself with men. Aeschines won, Timarchus was disenfranchised, and subsequently Aeschines was cleared of the charges against him.²⁰

We cannot now know whether or not Timarchus went from one male lover to another solely for money, or whether he simply preferred being the passive partner. The Athenian Council seems to have assumed prostitution in cases such as his. It is noteworthy that in this case there is no suggestion that the other men took the passive role, while he took the active. Timarchus's accuser, Aeschines, freely granted that he himself had been *erastes* to many males²¹—that is, that he had taken the active role—and he was blameless. Timarchus's crime was that he, as a free adult male, exercised his rights as an Athenian citizen even though his sexual behavior was inappropriate: he accepted anal intercourse from more than one man.²²

Apart from the case of Timarchus, there is evidence that some Athenian youths liked the role of *eromenos* and extended it by shaving their bodies, trimming their beards close,²³ and continuing in a homosexual relationship with an older man.²⁴ A small amount of evidence shows that men disliked it when their beloved youths began to develop body hair, and so shaving the body was an obvious

20. See *ibid.*, chap. 2. Dover uses a more accurate system of transliteration than I do: Timarkhos and Aiskhines. Traditionally, the spelling of Greek names in English has depended on prior Latin transliteration, which yields Timarchus and Aeschines. I have decided to Latinize all Greek names in this work, partly to facilitate reference to the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*.

21. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, 42.

22. Anal intercourse was the defining element of Greek homosexual activity. There is not much evidence about oral intercourse, but it seems to have been regarded as shameful. See *ibid.*, 99; for Rome, see Amy Richlin, *The Garden of Priapus: Sexuality and Aggression in Roman Humor* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 26–29; John R. Clarke, *Roman Sex* (New York: Abrams, 2003), 116–20.

23. In the classical period, Greek men wore beards; cf. above, pp. 369–70.

24. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, 144.

step for a young man who wished to maintain his status.²⁵ That is, even among the elite not everyone changed roles at the right time. Males who accepted physical love when they were young teenagers sometimes found it difficult to change from *eromenos* to *erastes* when they reached adulthood. This seems not to have been disgraceful, provided that they did not go from man to man and that they fulfilled their duty to marry and sire children.

It can hardly be the case that outside of the elite circles the pursuit of boys was positively evaluated on cultural and pedagogical grounds. It is this evaluation, and the social conventions that accompanied it, that set the elite Athenians apart from other Greeks. As far as we can tell, all Greeks shared the views that I listed under *generalizations*: it was normal for men to desire males as well as females and adult free males should always assume the active role in sex. Variations from class to class, city to city (Sparta was not the same as Athens, and Thebes was different from both), and century to century can be studied by readers who wish to pursue the question. I shall offer just one quotation, a quotation that has the advantage of indicating distinctions within fourth-century BCE Greece while also providing an amusing glimpse of the snobbery of elite Athenians. Plato wrote,

In Elis and Boeotia . . . and wherever else the people are naturally inarticulate, it has been definitely ruled that it is right for the lover [*erastēs*] to have his way. Nor does anyone, old or young, presume to say that it is wrong—the idea being, I suppose, to save themselves from having to plead with the young men for their favors, which is rather difficult for lovers who are practically dumb.²⁶

Plato attributes this remark to Pausanias, who is describing the

25. Ibid., 99, 144; Cantarella, *Bisexuality in the Ancient World*, 38–39, 73. On body hair, see also Richlin, *Garden of Priapus*, 37.

26. Plato, *Symposium* 182b, translated by Michael Joyce in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (New York: Pantheon Books, 1961).

elegance of the Athenian view and contrasting it to the crudity of people in other parts of Greece, who are depicted as being barely able to speak Greek, and who therefore are not capable of the stylized Athenian customs. In Elis (the region in which Olympia was the main city) and Boeotia (Thebes), our opening two generalizations still apply, though in some respects the social and economic environments were different.²⁷

Rome before Hellenization

By the first century, the Greek custom of pursuing boys, even including boys who would grow up to be citizens, was accepted by the Roman elite. But homosexual activity in Rome preceded the influence of Greek culture and had indigenous roots. I turn now to part of Eva Cantarella's study, *Bisexuality in the Ancient World*. To abbreviate this discussion, which (in my view) is simpler and less interesting than that of Athens, I shall quote a few lines from Cantarella's beginning summary:

. . . for a Roman [male], virility was the greatest of virtues: a political virtue. From earliest childhood, a Roman was raised to be a dominator. As a *civis romanus* [Roman citizen], he was destined for a single task, to rule the world. . . . In order to become a *civis romanus* worthy of the name, he had to learn from the earliest age never to submit, and to impose his will on everybody—including his sexual will. . . . [T]he Romans [insisted] that pederasty [love of boys] was a Greek vice. Pederasty required that the lover should engage in an intellectual, psychological and sexual game which lay completely outside the mentality of a Roman. In Greece, as we know, anyone who loved a boy had to court him, flatter him, prove his love for him, persuade him of the seriousness of his intentions. For a Roman, all of this would show a lack of virility. . . . But it would be completely wrong to assume, on this

27. Cantarella's book, as noted above, covers a very broad range of material. Dover has brief discussions of Sparta and Boeotia (see his index), and he also notes changes over time (e.g., pp. 81, 151).

account, that the Romans were rigorously heterosexual. For a Roman, the highest expression of virility consisted in putting other men down. It was all too easy, and too paltry, for a real man merely to subject women to his desires. For the powerful and inexhaustible Roman male, women could not suffice. His exuberant and irrepressible sexuality had to be expressed without limitations: he had to possess all the possible objects of his desire, independently of their sex.²⁸

This is a very blunt description, and the hostile tone may lead one to think that it is exaggerated. It seems, however, to point basically in the right direction. To these lines I need add only one further point: in pre-Hellenized Rome, men did not pursue boys who would later be citizens.²⁹ Instead of going through stages, and moving from passive to active (as in Greece), the Roman male citizen should never be the passive recipient of sexual activity. Of course, if a Roman man wanted a boy, slaves were available.

We see, then, that before the Hellenization of Rome, Athenians and Romans had completely different views of boys who would later be citizens; but, despite this and other differences, our two generalizations apply to a culture that was much different from classical Athens: men desired males as well as females and a free adult male was never passive.

Changes after Hellenization

I used classical Athens and pre-Hellenized Rome as examples because these were small and fairly self-contained societies in which social rules were very powerful. It is thus easy to generalize about attitudes toward sex. The conquests of the Macedonian Alexander the Great (which began in 334 BCE) and, later, the Roman conquest of the Mediterranean world, led to extensive cultural interchanges. The

28. Cantarella, *Bisexuality in the Ancient World*, 98.

29. *Ibid.*, 100.

tight little society of classical Athens was no longer quite so closed. Roman attitudes changed as the result of Greek and other influences and, especially, subtle social rules broke down as populations mixed and mingled. Roman women became relatively independent and powerful, with the result that adultery was possible even in elite circles. In particular, Roman men, as I have already indicated, sometimes acquired the Greek habit of pederasty.³⁰

Most surprisingly, some famous and powerful Romans, such as Julius Caesar and Octavian (later Augustus), were believed to have been the passive partners of male lovers. This might be ridiculed (of Caesar, it was said that he was “every woman’s husband and every man’s wife”), since in the Roman world effeminacy was still despised, thought to be a sign that a man was passive in sexual relations with other men, and most people still thought that it was wrong for a free adult male to be passive. On the other hand, it was difficult to think that Caesar and Octavian were weak and effeminate; thus men were offered more sexual options.³¹ Despite the fact that during the Roman Empire there was more choice, the denigration of passivity on the part of men continued, but it also became conceivable that some free adult men might accept the passive role in homosexual activity.³²

Women

Very little ancient literature written by women survives. The only verbal evidence from a woman that bears on homosexual love consists

30. A *pais* is a child, but Greek discussions of *eros* directed toward a child always refer to boys. *Pais* or *paidika* (derived from *pais*) was used of the junior partner in a homosexual relationship even if the younger male was old enough to be called a “youth” in other contexts (Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, 85). That is, the term *paiderastia*, “love of boys,” does not necessarily refer to a prepubescent male child.

31. On Caesar, Octavian, and others, see Cantarella, *Bisexuality in the Ancient World*, 156–64; Richlin, *Garden of Priapus*, 8. One should not assume that all of these accusations are accurate.

32. See, for example, Cantarella, *Bisexuality in the Ancient World*, 155, and further below, pp. 743–44.

of the poems of Sappho, written on the island of Lesbos in the pre-classical period (sixth century BCE). It has often been thought that she was an important figure in a social club (*thiasos*) for girls, where they learned music, poetry, and the other arts.³³ It appears from the fragmentary poems that survive that she loved some of these girls, and presumably loved them physically. She also seems to have expected reciprocation (which Athenian *erastai* did not expect of their *eromenoi*).³⁴ We cannot say that this sort of female society continued in Greece into the fifth century. It is virtually certain that classical Athens—the source of most evidence about ancient Greece—had no such societies. This does not prove that female homosexuality was eliminated, but only that it lost a social base.

A myth of human origin in Plato's *Symposium* reveals knowledge that some females made love to other females. According to this myth (as Dover summarizes it),

human beings were originally double, each with two heads, four legs, two genital systems, and so on, but Zeus ordered their bisection, and ever since . . . each of us goes round seeking his or her "other half" and falling in love with it when we find it. In this story the products of an original double male are homosexual males . . . who marry and beget children "under the compulsion of custom, without natural inclination". . . the products of an original double female are homosexual females . . . and the rest are heterosexual, the products of an original male-female.³⁵

Unfortunately this myth reveals nothing about actual sexual practices. Perhaps we could imagine that an aristocratic Athenian woman, often ignored by her husband, and sequestered by slaves, might notice that a female slave was attractive. This is mere speculation, but I would be surprised to learn that it never happened. Moreover,

33. On the life of Sappho, see OCD3, 1355; on the sexuality of her poems, see Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, 173–79; Cantarella, *Bisexuality in the Ancient World*, 78–87.

34. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, 177.

35. Ibid., 62, summarizing Plato, *Symposium* 189d–192b.

according to one (male) source, Spartan women loved girls.³⁶ One Attic vase “shows a kneeling woman fingering the genital region of another woman.”³⁷

In Roman literature there are references to female homosexual activity, all by men, and all derogatory.³⁸ I shall quote a passage cited by Cantarella from the work of a medical writer, Caelius Aurelianus:

These women are more desirous of lying with women than with men. In practice, they want women with male concupiscence, and when they are tired or temporarily satisfied in their passions they throw themselves, like victims of perennial intoxication, onto new forms of pleasure. Ensnared by this damnable style of life, they find pleasure in the use of their sexual powers. Like the *molles* [“soft” males], the *tribades* [homosexual females] are also affected by mental disease.³⁹

There are numerous other passages that criticize or ridicule female homosexuality, but we learn nothing from them about how women saw the matter. They only show that some women made love to women.⁴⁰ There is also some visual evidence of lesbian activities from wall-paintings and decorated utensils.⁴¹ Female homosexual activity, however, had no theoretical justification in the (male) views of society, as did male homosexuality. Without a substantial body of literature from females, we cannot go much further than to say that women did sometimes pursue homosexual activities and that the male-dominated society generally disapproved.

36. *Ibid.*, 173, citing Plutarch.

37. *Ibid.*

38. See, especially, Richlin, *Garden of Priapus*, 134.

39. Cantarella, *Bisexuality in the Ancient World*, 169.

40. See more fully Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, 171–84; Cantarella, *Bisexuality in the Ancient World*, 78–88 (Greece), 164–71 (Rome).

41. Thomas K. Hubbard, ed., *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook of Basic Documents* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), plates 3, 4a, 9, 13, following p. 267. Additional plates in Clarke, *Roman Sex*, 116–37.

Gentile Criticisms of Homosexual Activity

I have discussed the gentile view of sex that I consider to be average, normal, and dominant: it is natural for males to be sexually active, and also natural for them to desire both females and males. Gentile moralists, however, sometimes objected to this view of “nature,” or, though not entirely disagreeing, wished to limit sexual activity in various ways. Greek-speaking Jews had partial allies, some of whose arguments they reflected, though without acknowledgement. Paul’s vice lists came from the synagogue, not from Stoic or other gentile philosophers, but it is nevertheless of some interest to find agreements between pagan and Jewish views of sex, especially since above I emphasized that this is a point on which Christianity’s two ancestors (Jewish and Greco-Roman culture) disagreed. Though the subject is interesting and challenging, I shall treat it very quickly, the aim being to show the degree to which the most thoughtful pagans could disagree with average Greco-Roman society.

Plato and Socrates

I shall make no attempt to uncover the “real” opinion of Plato or Socrates. Our evidence for both is mostly based on the Platonic dialogues, in which different characters take different positions. One can try to discover Plato’s own view, but that is beyond my competence and the requirements of this book. It is easier to discover Plato’s view of Socrates’s opinions, but I shall not attempt this either. As above, I shall rely on Dover in discussing Plato’s dialogues, though any reader of them can see there what he sees.

In the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* “Plato takes homosexual desire and homosexual love as the starting-point from which to develop his metaphysical theory.”⁴² That is not to say that the overall conclusion

42. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, 12.

from reading these dialogues is that men should actually engage in sex with young males. One of the most famous stories in the Platonic corpus concerns Alcibiades's offer to have sex with Socrates and Socrates's refusal; homosexual desire is an entry into consideration of Beauty, not the starting point for physical gratification (*Symposium* 216c–219e, summarized by Dover, (157–58). One cannot understand the *Symposium* unless one understands the role of homosexual eros in elite Athenian circles, but the “message” is that physical gratification is a temptation that the true philosopher should resist. Dover remarks that “in praising the ability to resist temptation to bodily pleasure Plato was fully in accord with Greek moral tradition.”⁴³

In the *Laws*, however, one of Plato's latest works, the tone is harsher. One of the speakers (the Athenian) states that heterosexual intercourse is “granted in accordance with nature,” while homosexual relations are “contrary to nature” and “a crime caused by failure to control the desire for pleasure.”⁴⁴ Later the Athenian states that animals might prove the point: male animals do not use other males sexually.⁴⁵ (The behavior of bonobos, pygmy chimpanzees, had not been observed.)⁴⁶

This is, of course, very close to the view of “nature” seen in Jewish literature in Greek (e.g., Josephus, above, p. 351; Philo, above, pp. 355–62), though the prohibition of intercourse with women who are menstruants does not appear.

43. Ibid., 154.

44. *Spec. Laws* 1.636a–c; Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, 165.

45. *Spec. Laws* 8.836c–e; Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, 166. See more fully *Spec. Laws* 8.835d–839d. In 8.838e–839a, we find that the Athenian favours “restricting procreative intercourse to its *natural* function by abstention from congress with our own sex, with its deliberate murder of the race and its wasting of the seed of life on a stony and rocky soil, where it will never take root and bear its *natural* fruit. . . .” Similarly Philo warned that homosexual intercourse would have led to depopulation had God not intervened by destroying Sodom and blessing the unions of male and female (*Abraham* 136–38).

46. On Plato's scant knowledge even of the animals that he might have observed, see Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, 167.

Seneca

Lucius Annaeus Seneca, the Younger (c. 4 BCE–65 CE), a Stoic philosopher, was of the view that men should not engage in sex very often even with their wives. Moderation was the watchword. Moreover, men should imitate animals, which have sexual relations only in order to produce offspring, and thus should avoid intercourse even with their wives during pregnancy.⁴⁷

Musonius Rufus

Musonius Rufus, a first-century CE Stoic, was also of the view that sex should be limited to intercourse between husband and wife when procreation was possible. He thought that sexual intercourse even in marriage was unlawful when the aim was mere pleasure (*hēdone*).⁴⁸

Dio Chrysostom

Dio Chrysostom, a Stoic–Cynic moralist of the late first century CE, criticized men who took the active role in homosexual intercourse as being excessively lustful: women were not enough, and so they used men as well.⁴⁹ This is simply part of the general criticism of bodily pleasure that is common in gentile philosophy. It also reveals, incidentally, the degree to which active males were not regarded as “homosexual” in “orientation”: they used both women and men.

In the works of two Stoics (Seneca and Musonius Rufus), then, one finds a view that is like the view of Josephus and Philo, who focused on procreation as the reason for sexual intercourse. Like Plato in the *Laws*, and like Philo and Josephus, they appealed to *nature*. I

47. Cantarella, *Bisexuality in the Ancient World*, 190.

48. On Musonius and Paul, see R. B. Ward, “Musonius and Paul on Marriage,” *New Testament Studies* 36 (1990): 281–89.

49. See Victor Furnish, *The Moral Teaching of Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 62–63.

should only point out that these authors (and a few others with similar opinions) were against *any* unnecessary sex, and they viewed only procreation as necessary.

Jewish and Christian Views in Context

Of the Jewish authors, only Philo shares the opinion of Musonius Rufus (and others) that passion and desire were to be avoided as far as possible.⁵⁰ Josephus, on the other hand, accepted “desire” (*epithymia*) as part of a legitimate marriage (*Antiq.* 4.244f.). We saw above, in discussing 1 Thess. 4:4–5 (pp. 215–19), that Paul (at least at this point in his career) thought that people should not marry merely because of the passion (*pathos*) of desire (*epithymia*), but in 1 Corinthians 7 he accepted desire as creating a situation in which it was better to marry than not (above, pp. 288–95). Paul, then, despite 1 Thess. 4:5, did not entirely exclude the role of desire from the Christian life. It is probable that only a few Jews followed Philo in accepting the anti-pleasure position of some Greco-Roman philosophers, partly because relatively few were students of Greek philosophy, partly because Jewish Scripture does not oppose pleasure and desire.

In any case, the opinions of Seneca, Musonius Rufus, and others are quite different from the Jewish condemnation of all homosexual acts, which was based on different principles—usually not an analysis of the harmful effects of passion, but rather study of the biblical passages that I cited in chapter 12 (pp. 349–51). Philo argued that both passive and active male partners should be executed, which agrees with Leviticus, not with Seneca or Musonius Rufus.

Paul’s view of homosexual intercourse is most closely paralleled not

50. Philo, *Spec. Laws* 4.79–99, e.g., “Every passion (*pathos*) is blameworthy” (§79); “but none of the passions is so troublesome as desire” (*epithymia*) (§80). Philonic Judaism did not survive; this view was not accepted by the rabbis, who came to define what Judaism would be. Philo was, however, influential on Christians. Eusebius of Caesarea, for example, regarded him as a Christian, largely because of his acceptance of such points as this.

in Greek or Roman philosophers, but in the works of other Jews. We have seen several times that Paul warned against submitting to the “desires of the flesh.” I shall repeat the main passages:

Live by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desire of the flesh. (Gal. 5:16)

Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. (Gal. 5:24)

Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. (Rom. 13:14)

In all three cases, the NIV changes “flesh” to “sinful nature.” The JB and NEB use the word *body* and refer to its appetites or cravings. This obscures the parallels between Paul and other Greek-speaking Jews, which use the words *passions*, *desires*, and *flesh*.

Despite Paul’s general negativity toward pleasures of the flesh, he did not tell his converts that marriage should not include desire. He thought that an ascetic way of life, like his own, was best for Christians, but he did not try to impose on his converts the view that all pleasure and all desire should be eliminated from their lives.

A lot of pagan philosophers thought that physical pleasure should be avoided or at least reduced to a minimum. Epicurus thought that the wise man should not marry; the Epicurean Lucretius thought that the wise man should avoid desire, since it prevents the attainment of serenity. The Cynic Diogenes thought that men should not marry.⁵¹ One version of Greek metaphysics, which included the view that whatever is fleshly is bad, and with it one version of Greek morality, that physical pleasure is wrong, was destined to be extremely influential, and it was ultimately adopted by Christianity. This view was supported by the best medical thought of the later Roman Empire, which held that sexual abstinence or near-abstinence was

51. For all these examples, see Cantarella, *Bisexuality in the Ancient World*, 190.

best for men, since sexual activities were tiring “for the chest, the lungs, the head and the nerves.”⁵² Avoidance of physical gratification was morally good and physically healthy. This view pushed Christianity toward ascetism, which in the end it embraced with enthusiasm.

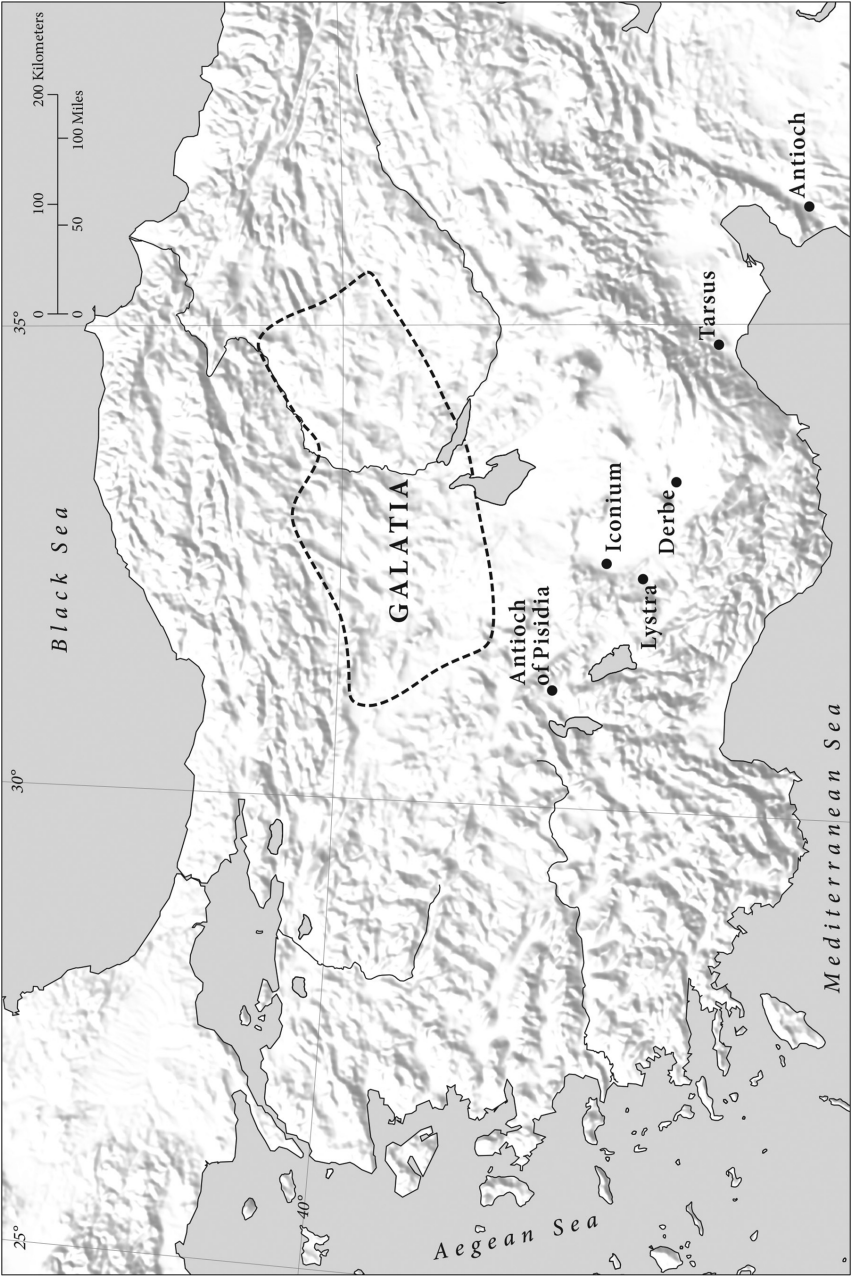
This anti-pleasure, ascetic worldview is no more Jewish than is homosexuality. Thus, after Paul, Christianity did not accept *only* Jewish values. But once Christianity accepted the sexually repressive side of Greco-Roman thought, it naturally rejected all competing views, including (but not limited to) the view that homosexual activity was *natural*—the average, everyday Greek view. Probably Paul’s letters would have been sufficient to achieve this last result, but in any case the combination of Jewish sexual ethics and the various Greco-Roman philosophical and medical denigrations of sexual pleasure succeeded in eliminating entirely the standard, average gentile view, that it was natural for men to desire both females and males and to have intercourse with both.

Summary

To summarize: Originally, and on average, Greeks and Romans thought that sexual desire was natural and blameless, and especially that it was good and blameless for adult males actively to pursue and engage in sex with both females and males. The “and males” part of the last sentence was completely antithetical to Judaism. This was the great cultural clash to which I referred above (pp. 344–46). But a line of Greek philosophy, which grew more powerful as the centuries advanced, held that passion and desire themselves were harmful. That view was adopted by a few Jews, such as Philo, but more importantly by Christians, who combined it with the Jewish condemnation of

52. Aline Rousselle, *Porneia. On Desire and the Body in Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1988), chap. 1; the quotation is from Galen of Pergamum and appears on p. 17.

homosexual activity. Paul himself condemned homosexual activity and warned his converts against the pleasures of the flesh, but he did not prohibit passion and desire within marriage.



Appendix II: Where was Galatia? Who were the Galatians?

Location: Two Uses of the Term *Galatia*

In Paul's letter "to the churches of Galatia" (1:2), he does not refer to specific towns or cities. In the absence of the names of cities or towns, we must examine the ancient uses of the word *Galatia* for information about the destination of the letter. Immediately we find that the word might have two different meanings when used of an area in Asia Minor.¹

The root meaning of the word *Galatia* is not in question. Ancient Greek and Latin authors used *Galatai* (Greek) or *Galatae* (Latin) to refer to a group of people who were also designated as *Keltoi* (Greek), *Celtae* (Latin), and *Galli* (Latin). "Gallia" (a place where Galli lived) morphed into "Gaul," and the ancient Celts are frequently referred to as "Gauls."² All these words refer to the large group of people

1. On "Asia Minor" as a geographical term see pp. 762–63.

2. On the words, see J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (London and Cambridge: MacMillan and Co., 1865, 10th ed., 1890), 1–4; Ernest deWitt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (New York: Scribner, 1920), xvii–xviii. According to Julius Caesar, the people whom he fought in the Gallic wars called themselves *Celtae* (=Greek *Keltoi*), while the Romans called them *Galli* (*Gallic Wars* 1.1). The words *Keltoi* and *Galli* probably have different origins, but by the first century they referred to the same people. See, for example, Henry Liddell and Robert Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon: A Supplement* (Oxford:

today called “Celts,” who at one time dominated much of continental Europe and the outlying islands. What we now call “France,” for example, was in Paul’s day named “Gallia.” English speaking authors now usually call it “Gaul.” “Galatia” has the same meaning as “Gallia”: an area inhabited by Celts. Except in quotations, I shall use “Celts” to designate the people and avoid the word *Gauls*.

Celts lived in a lot of places in the ancient world, and they gave their name to various locales, but Paul’s “Galatia” was an area in Asia Minor. In the third century BCE, groups of Celts pushed into central Asia Minor. They settled in an area in the northwestern quarter of the central plateau of Asia Minor, around the ancient city Ancyra, now called Ankara, the capital of modern Turkey.³ Below, we shall consider in more detail where they settled, why they came, who they were, and what they did. Now we simply note that this geographical region around Ancyra, controlled by Celts, is the first of the two possible meanings of “Galatia” in Paul’s letter. We shall call this the *regional* meaning of “Galatia”: the part of Asia Minor settled and ruled by Celts.⁴

The second possible meaning of “Galatia” arises from the fact that early in his reign, the emperor Augustus created a large province in the center of Asia Minor, taking in several regions that extended almost from the Black Sea in the north to the Mediterranean Sea in the south, which he named “Galatia” (25 BCE). This is the *provincial* meaning of “Galatia.”⁵

Clarendon, 1968), s.v. *keltikos*; this adjective means “Celtic” or “Gallic.” The *OED*, s.v. “Gaul,” regards the French “Gaule” as a “phonologically obscure” adoption of the Latin *Galli*.

3. The name has sometimes been transliterated as “Angora.”

4. On the history of the Celts or Gauls in Asia Minor, their way of life, and the towns of the region, which retained their indigenous populations, see A. H. M. Jones, *Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 110–22.

5. On the history of the province of Galatia, see *ibid.*, 133–36.

The original, regional Galatia was a long oval, running approximately east to west, 200 to 300 miles long and about 120 miles wide.⁶ The new Galatian province included the area conquered by the Celts but was substantially larger, approximately 420 miles from top to bottom, though of about the same breadth as regional Galatia.⁷ The province took in not only the region previously called “Galatia,” but also territories designated by the regional names Pisidia and Lycaonia.⁸ The creation of the province did not, however, drive out the use of “Galatia” to mean “the territory settled by Celts” or “the area once governed by Celtic rulers.”⁹ Thus when Paul wrote “to the churches in Galatia,” he could have written to churches in northwest Asia Minor (“regional” Galatia) or to churches elsewhere in the much larger Roman province of Galatia. These two possibilities are designated the “North Galatia” and the “South Galatia” hypotheses.

6. Over two hundred miles (Lightfoot, *Galatians*, 6). The map on p. 748 shows a length of about 300 miles. It is taken from Hermann Bengtson and Vladimir Milošević, eds., *Grosser historischer Weltatlas*, 1. Teil, Munich, 1963, p. 32. We cannot be precise about the dimensions of ethnic Galatia, and most atlases do not draw lines, but only indicate the region by printing the name at the appropriate place.

7. See Richard Talbert, *Atlas of Classical History* (New York: Macmillan, 1985), 129.

8. Augustus based the large province of Galatia on the kingdom of Amyntas, the king of Galatia, who had acquired territories beyond the bounds of the original Galatia. He was an extremely able king, and in 36 BCE Antony had given him Pamphylia, Pisidia, and Lycaonia (Jones, *Cities*, 133). After Octavian defeated Antony, Amyntas went over to his side. Octavian, who became Augustus, also found Amyntas to be totally reliable, and he gave him further territory—which, however, the king had to conquer. He died in the attempt. Augustus did not find a worthy successor and thus took Amyntas’s territory for himself and turned it into a province. At the time of Paul, however, Pamphylia was no longer in the province of Galatia. In 43 CE, Claudius made it and Lycia into a new province, Lycia et Pamphylia. This means that in Paul’s day Perga (see below) was not part of the province of Galatia.

9. For our purposes, there is no need to distinguish the area where Celtic was spoken from the area once governed by a Celtic king. I shall use “regional Galatia” to refer to both of these territories. We need only distinguish “regional Galatia” from the Roman province “Galatia,” which included regional Galatia but also quite a lot of other territory. For a distinction of three meanings of Galatia (where Celtic was spoken; land once ruled by a Celtic king; the Roman province), see Kirsopp Lake, “Paul’s Route in Asia Minor,” *The Acts of the Apostles*, ed. F. J. Foakes-Jackson et al. (London: Macmillan, 1932), 5:233.

The South Galatia Hypothesis: The Evidence from Acts

To understand the force of the South Galatia hypothesis, we need to look at part of Paul's travels as reported in Acts.

Chapters 13 and 14 of Acts depict Paul as traveling through the southern part of the province of Galatia—south of regional Galatia—and preaching in five towns or cities of the area. Acts identifies four of these places by adding to the city name the pre-Roman regional name: Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:14), Lystra and Derbe in Lycaonia (14:6), and Perga in Pamphylia (14:24).¹⁰ Acts does not assign the fifth city, Iconium (14:1), to a region, but it too was in Lycaonia.¹¹ Four of these five cities were in the Roman province of Galatia (Perga was in Lycia et Pamphylia), but Acts reveals that the older names of regions endured: Acts uses the regional names and does not mention “Galatia” in describing this trip (though the author does mention it later).

If, in writing to the Galatians, Paul had in mind Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, Pisidian Antioch, and Perga, or some selection of these cities, he addressed the letter to churches in the southern part of the Roman province of Galatia (perhaps also to a city in Lycia et Pamphylia), not to the area of Celtic settlement. The view that he wrote to these five churches, or some of them, is the “South Galatia hypothesis.”

There are two other relevant references in subsequent chapters in Acts. According to 16:6, Paul and his companions “went through the region [*chōra*] of Phrygia and Galatia.” Later, Acts relates that they went through “the region [*chōra*] of Galatia and Phrygia” (18:23; more literally, “the Galatian region and Phrygian,” or possibly “the Galatian region and Phrygia,” see below), without offering further

10. The town name is always spelled “Perga” in biblical translations, but the Greek is *pergē*, which would usually be transliterated “Perge,” as it is in the works of Roman historians.

11. M. P. Charlesworth in *CAH* 10:679.

particulars.¹² If these phrases mean “the part of the Roman province of Galatia near Phrygia,” they might refer to Iconium and Pisidian Antioch (“south Galatia”), but if the phrase used the older regional names, it could mean territory north and northeast of Antioch, to which Acts does not otherwise refer (“north Galatia”).

Phrygia was only a regional (or ethnic) title, never the name of a province. Part of the territory settled by the Phrygians had been taken over by the Celts (north Phrygia became the region of Galatia), and the rest had been annexed to the province of Asia in the early days of Roman political organization in Asia Minor. Moreover, *chōra* refers much more naturally to a geographical area than to a political entity. It is highly likely that both Acts 16:6 and 18:23 refer to the ethnic regions rather than to one ethnic region (Phrygia) and one province (Galatia).¹³

In this case, the book of Acts does not use “Galatia” to refer to the Roman province, but rather to the region settled by Celts.

But even though Acts mentions the region of Galatia, it does not say that Paul founded churches there, while it does say that he founded churches in the southern part of the province Galatia—namely, in Pisidia, Lycaonia, and Pamphylia.

Many scholars believe the silence of Acts to be decisive: Paul could not have written to the people who lived in the region of Galatia, because if he had, Acts would have mentioned the founding of churches in regional Galatia. Consequently, by “Galatia” Paul must

12. Phrygia had not existed as an integral entity for a long time. The Galatians (as we shall see below) settled in northern Phrygia c. 265 BCE, taking over, among other places, Pessinus, a city of great religious importance to Phrygians. Rome made most of the rest of Phrygia part of the province of Asia in 120 BCE (Jones, *Cities*, 59). The important regional name, however, had great staying power.

13. While the two difficult phrases of Acts 16:6 and 18:23 will never be construed to the satisfaction of everyone, I think that everyone should agree that the words imply regions and not provinces. I am attracted to the solution offered by Kirsopp Lake: “‘Phrygia and Galatian country’ means territory in which sometimes Phrygian and sometimes Gaelic [Celtic] was the language of the villagers” (“Paul’s Route in Asia Minor,” 5:236).

have meant the southern part of the province. Instead of using the regional names of Acts, he lumped together some or all of the five churches mentioned above (Derbe, Lystra, and so on) and wrote to them as “the churches of Galatia” (Gal. 1:2) and spoke to the people as “You foolish Galatians” (Gal. 3:1). One may object, however, that it would be very strange to call Greeks in Lycaonia and Pisidia “Galatians,” since the word definitely means “Celts.”¹⁴ The alternative is to say that Acts does not tell us everything that Paul did and that Paul addressed as “Galatians” the people who lived in regional Galatia.

South or North Galatia?: A Closer Look

Although we know in advance that we shall not learn for certain to whom Paul addressed Galatians, we shall briefly consider some of the main points. The questions of the location of the Galatian churches and of the ethnic background of the recipients do not matter very much to the interpretation of the letter; but the question, like the mountain that must be climbed, is *there*. The topic has further merits: sorting out ancient places and place names is intrinsically interesting (at least for some of us); the “North Galatia hypothesis” (which I favor) is in need of restatement; the question provides the welcome opportunity to study one aspect of Acts’ account of Paul’s missionary activity.

Thus we shall consider the question of “Galatia” in some detail. To simplify the discussion, I shall refer principally to two classical commentaries on Galatians, those by J. B. Lightfoot (1865, tenth ed., 1890) and Ernest De Witt Burton (1921). It is enlightening in many respects to read the introductions to these two great commentaries.¹⁵

14. Cf. *ibid.*, 5:235.

15. Lightfoot, *Galatians*, 1–68; Burton, *Galatians*, xvii–lxxxix. There is, however, one very regrettable aspect of Lightfoot’s introduction. He accepted crude stereotypes of ethnic groups as providing historically useful information. Thus when he decided that Galatians was addressed to north Galatia, he felt able to discuss the temperament and character of the converts on the basis

I have chosen these old commentaries partly because the location of Paul's Galatia was a much-debated topic when they were written and partly because of the learning and skill that these two scholars displayed.¹⁶

It will be helpful to begin this discussion with two lists: one giving the names of the major regions of Asia Minor prior to the Roman conquest, the other providing the names of the Roman provinces in Asia Minor in 60 CE.¹⁷ The date is important, since Rome occasionally rearranged some of the provinces. It will be seen that the Roman Province "Galatia" covered all or a large part of four regions in addition to regional Galatia.

of assumed characteristics of Celts (see especially pp. 12–17): inclined to drunkenness, quick to learn, inconstant and quarrelsome, and so on.

16. Although two of the more recent major commentaries on Galatians in English accept the "North Galatia hypothesis" with very little discussion (H. D. Betz, *Galatians*, Hermeneia [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979], 1–5; J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [New York: Doubleday, 1997], 15–17), it seems useful to me to review the evidence and the arguments, as we did in the case of the arrangement of the Corinthian correspondence. Otherwise, it is only a question of whether one belongs to a more "conservative" or more liberal academic tradition. I continue to hope that evidence and argument still matter.

17. I take these from Talbert, *Atlas*, 70, 129. I have added Pisidia and Lycaonia from the maps on pp. 18, 160f. On Cilicia, see further n. 26 below.

Regional Names	Roman Names of Provinces in 60 CE ¹⁸
Lydia	Asia
Caria	Asia
Lycia	Lycia et Pamphylia
Pamphylia	Lycia et Pamphylia
Paphlagonia (part)	Bithynia et Pontus
Paphlagonia (part)	Galatia
Phrygia (part)	Galatia
Phrygia (part)	Asia
Galatia	Galatia
Pisidia	Galatia
Lycaonia	Galatia
Bithynia	Bithynia et Pontus
Pontus	Bithynia et Pontus
Cilicia	Syria (which included the eastern part of Cilicia)
Cappadocia	Cappadocia

With regard to the location of the Galatian churches, Lightfoot depended mostly on the fact that *in popular usage* “Galatia” meant regional or ethnic Galatia. In common speech, he proposed, people used the names on the left in the list above, not the names of Rome’s administrative divisions.¹⁹

It would scarcely be more strange to speak of Pesth and Presburg, of Venice and Verona, as “the Austrian cities,” than to entitle the Christian

18. See Talbert, *Atlas*, 129 (map). For information about what region was in what province when, I have also relied on Jones, *Cities*; Richard D. Sullivan, *Near Eastern Royalty and Rome: 100–30 BC* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990); the relevant volumes of the *Cambridge Ancient History*; the relevant entries in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*.

19. Although Lake disagreed with several aspects of Lightfoot’s views, he supports this, one of the main points: Lake, “Paul’s Route in Asia Minor,” 5:234–35.

brotherhoods of Derbe and Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, “the Churches of Galatia.”²⁰

Pesth (or Pest) is now seldom used alone in English. It is a city on the opposite side of the Danube from Buda; the two names are now linked as Budapest, which is in Hungary. Pressburg is the German name of Bratislava, now in Slovakia. Venice and Verona are, of course, now in Italy. At one time, these four cities were all part of the Hapsburg Empire, based in Austria and often called the Austro-Hungarian Empire.²¹ In Lightfoot’s view, such arbitrary political divisions as the Hapsburg Empire or the province of Galatia did not govern common speech. No one except a few government officials would say that Budapest was in Austria or that Derbe was in Galatia.²² Thus Lightfoot favored the North Galatia hypothesis,

20. Lightfoot, *Galatians*, 19.

21. See *The Times Atlas of World History*, ed. Geoffrey Barraclough, rev. ed. (Maplewood, NJ: Hammond, 1986), 197. It should be noted that a few decades after Lightfoot wrote, Venice and Verona were no longer in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which means that maps showing Europe in 1914 (for example) will obscure Lightfoot’s point.

22. In *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1989), Colin Hemer defended the South Galatia hypothesis (chap. 7), and he fixed especially on the question of terminology (290–307). His references reveal prodigious learning, but they do not actually meet the point. It would require several pages to go through his evidence, and I shall make only a few general comments. (1) The boundary markers, set up by Roman authorities, that use “Galatia” to refer to the province obviously have to do with governmental boundaries, not common usage; on this ground, we could say that in Lightfoot’s day people thought of Pest as being in Austria. (2) On his own evidence, the usual term for the local governing body was “council of the Galatians,” and it was used of the north. There is much less evidence for “council of Galatia.” (3) Strabo and Pliny obviously use the governmental designation. (4) Many of the inscriptions that Hemer cites, even though they are governmental, nevertheless designate the sphere of action of the provincial legate by listing the regional names of his province, which supports Lightfoot’s view of popular usage. (5) Hemer’s extensive study of personal names shows little evidence of Celtic names even in the north. This only shows that (a) the Celts adopted Greek or Roman names and (b) that most evidence of names comes from cities. In the north, the Celts had not substantially replaced the indigenous population, and they seem to have remained un-urbanized for a long time. For (b), see Jones, *Cities*, 117 (the Celts left the towns “much to themselves”), 120 (in Pessinus, the Phrygians retained “a superior position in the management of the temple of the Mother of the Gods. . . . [T]he five senior places were reserved for the indigenous population, and the five junior for the Gauls”). With regard to (a), see *ibid.*, 120 (by the first century BCE some Celtic rulers had adopted Greek names; an inscription “shows how quickly Celtic names were being discarded,” etc.). The reader should not think that Hemer’s wealth of citations actually supports his view. This is not to say, however, that it

according to which Paul founded churches in regional Galatia and subsequently wrote to them. Why is Acts silent about them? Lightfoot suggested that perhaps “the historian gladly drew a veil over the infancy of a Church which swerved so soon and so widely from the purity of Gospel.”²³

Burton, who accepted the South Galatia hypothesis, had three principal arguments. (1) Paul always used the geographical terms of the Roman government: “Judaea, Syria, Cilicia, Asia, Macedonia, Achaia, but never Lycaonia, Pisidia, Mysia or Lydia.”²⁴ (2) The evidence in favor of the North Galatia hypothesis is not strong enough to overthrow the fact that “we have no direct or definite evidence” of the existence of churches in regional Galatia.²⁵ (3) The best interpretation of Acts 16:6 and 18:23 is that Paul did not found churches in regional Galatia.

Burton’s arguments are not very convincing. We shall begin with his first point, that Paul used the terms of the Roman government, not regional titles. If true, this would mean that Paul’s usage was different from that of Acts, which as a rule used regional names when discussing places in Asia Minor. Let us now look at the evidence. In Gal. 1:21, reviewing his own career, Paul wrote that after his first visit to Jerusalem he “went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia.” The plural “regions” indicates that these were different areas, a view that is supported by the use of the definite article before each place name (visible only in Greek). During Paul’s lifetime, however, Cilicia was not a Roman province, but only the name of a region. Eastern Cilicia (where Tarsus, said in Acts to be Paul’s place of origin, was located)

would have been impossible for someone to use the word “Galatia” to refer to the cities in the southern part of the Roman province. “Popular usage” does not prove other uses of terms to be impossible.

23. Lightfoot, *Galatians*, 21.

24. Burton, *Galatians*, xxv.

25. *Ibid.*, xlv.

was part of the Roman province of Syria, and western Cilicia was part of the kingdom of Antiochus of Cappadocia.²⁶ Thus “the regions of Syria and Cilicia” in Gal. 1:21 are to be defined regionally and ethnographically, not provincially.²⁷ It is unlikely that Paul went into western Cilicia (which was mountainous, barbarous, and difficult to traverse), but rather into the regions of Syria and his native eastern Cilicia—which at the time comprised one province.

Still with regard to Burton’s first point, we should also observe that some of the “provincial” names used by Paul could be regional as well as provincial, since sometimes there was no distinction between the pre-Roman region and the Roman province—as one will see by looking at the lists above. Paul used “Judea,” it is true; between 44 and 66 CE “Judea” was a province, equally true; but “Judea” was also the name of the geographical region that included Jerusalem, and it is to

26. Around the year 100 BCE, Rome made Cilicia a small province, which subsequently fluctuated in size, and which served principally as a base for attacks on pirates. In 62 BCE Pompey reorganized Cilicia as a large province, including the coastland as far as Lycia and the inland regions Lycaonia, Pisidia, and southern Phrygia (*CAH* 9:392; see map facing p. 396; for the date, see the tables at the end of vol. 9). Around 39 BCE, Antony gave Cilicia Tracheia (western Cilicia) to Polemo of Laodicea (a reliable client king) (*CAH* 10:52); c. 37 BCE he gave the same land to Cleopatra (*CAH* 10:67). Octavian (after defeating Antony and Cleopatra at Actium, 31 BCE) gave the same territory to Amyntas, king of Galatia (*CAH* 10:114); apparently he temporarily administered the rest of Cilicia himself (*ibid.*). In the division of the provinces between himself and the Senate (27 BCE), Augustus (as Octavian was by then styled) assigned Syria, including Cilicia, to himself. This is eastern Cilicia (including Tarsus): Dio Cassius 53.12, *Enc. Bib.* 1, col. 828. Augustus gave eastern Lycaonia and Cilicia Tracheia to Archelaus, king of Cappadocia, in 20 BCE (*CAH* 10:261); in 37 CE, Gaius gave Commagene and western Cilicia to Antiochus IV of Commagene, while eastern Cilicia was still attached to Syria (*CAH* 10:661, 750). Vespasian, c. 72 CE, reconstituted the province of Cilicia, including both western and eastern regions in one province (*CAH* 11:602–605). On the history of Cilicia, see also Jones, *Cities*, 191–214.
27. Although Paul used “Cilicia” as a region, the matter is less clear in the book of Acts. In Paul’s lifetime, there was no province called “Cilicia” (as just noted), but when Acts was written Cilicia was a province. This could easily have led the author to think of Cilicia as a province when writing about an earlier period. In Acts 6:9, Cilicia might be a province. In 15:23, it is joined with Syria, with which it in fact formed one province in Paul’s day. In 15:41, the phrase “Syria and Cilicia” is probably meant to designate regions, rather than the combined province. By “Tarsus in Cilicia” (Acts 21:39; 22:3) Paul would have meant the region (if he in fact spoke these words), and Luke might have meant either the region or the province. Acts 23:34 refers to Cilicia as a province, and 27:5 lists it with two other regions in Asia Minor.

the area around Jerusalem that Paul refers in all of the passages where he uses “Judea” (Rom. 15:31; 2 Cor. 1:16; Gal. 1:22; and 1 Thess. 2:14).

Could this also be true of Macedonia and Achaia, names that referred to regions prior to their organization as Roman provinces? In these cases, Paul probably used the provincial names, as Burton proposed. In Paul’s day, the numerous regions of Greece and Macedonia (Macedonia, Thessaly, Attica, Achaia, etc.) comprised only two Roman provinces, Macedonia in the north and Achaia in the south.²⁸ The key fact is that Paul twice uses the phrase “Achaia and Macedonia,” apparently referring to all the areas in Europe where he had worked (Rom. 15:26; 1 Thess. 1:7f.) One could, to be sure, quibble by pointing out that the only churches that Paul mentions were in *regional* Macedonia and Achaia, as well as in provincial Macedonia and Achaia. Paul’s numerous references to Macedonia refer to his churches in Thessalonica and Philippi, which were in Macedonia by any definition (1 Cor. 16:5; 2 Cor. 1:16; 2:13; 7:5; 8:1; 11:9; Phil. 4:15; 1 Thess. 4:10). Paul refers to only two churches in Greece, Athens and Corinth. Athens was a free city, outside the Roman provincial system. Thus, leaving Athens aside, we note that Corinth was in Achaia, whether one was using regional names or provincial names.

With regard to Greece, however, I do not wish to disagree that Paul used the governmental or provincial names. But he did not use them with regard to the territory that he knew best—Syria and Cilicia.

Our question is whether or not Burton was correct in stating that Paul never used regional titles, but always the names of Roman

28. For the regions, see Hermann Bengtson, Vladimir Milojčić, and Ernst Walter Zeeden *Grosser historischer Weltatlas*, 1. Teil: Vorgeschichte und Altertum (Munich: Bayerisch Schulbuchverlag, 1958), 18f. for the provinces see Talbert, *Atlas*, 129.

provinces. This is certainly not correct in the case of Cilicia and Syria, and it is dubious in the case of Judea.

We should now note one last point about Achaia: Acts, which in describing Asia Minor usually employs regional names, uses “Achaia” to refer to the Roman province: Acts 18:12 (“Gallio was proconsul of Achaia”); 18:27 (Apollos crossed from Ephesus to Achaia); 19:21 (Paul resolved to travel through Macedonia and Achaia). Gallio was proconsul of a Roman province, and it is likely that Achaia in all three passages is the Roman province. Acts, in short, used regional names in Asia Minor and provincial names in Greece.

Acts’ usage leads one to think that the Roman provincial names were better established in Macedonia and Greece than they were in Asia Minor. Study of Cilicia (n. 26 above) reveals how changeable the Roman provinces in Asia Minor could be; the organization of Macedonia and Greece fluctuated less, and so the provincial names were more useful. In Asia Minor, the provincial names were both recent and transitory.

The constant shifting of the borders of provinces, and consequently the “movement” of various regions of Asia Minor from one province to another, must be emphasized. In 60 BCE (after Pompey’s reorganization), for example, the only Roman provinces in the East were Asia, Bithynia et Pontus, Cilicia, and Syria.²⁹ Cilicia was huge and included all of the southern regions from Asia in the west to Syria in the east. Some years later, under Augustus, it was not a province at all.

In 133 BCE, Pamphylia was part of the province of Asia. Around 80 BCE it became part of Cilicia; it reverted to Asia in the 40s and was made part of Galatia in 25 BCE. In 43 CE, it became part of the province of Lycia et Pamphylia.

29. Talbert, *Atlas*, 102.

It is impossible for me to think that the people of Pamphylia were called “Asians,” then “Cilicians,” then “Asians” again, then “Galatians,” and then “Lycians and Pamphylians.” But this is, in effect, what the “South Galatia” hypothesis proposes: that Paul called the Antiochians or Pisidians in Pisidia, the Lycaonians of Lystra and Derbe, and the Pamphylians of Perga “Galatians.” It is probable that they all called themselves “Greeks,” but in any case “Galatians” would have meant “Celts” to them.

I have reserved “Asia” for last, because it is a special case. “Asia” is used throughout the New Testament to refer to the Roman province, even in Acts (which, to repeat, otherwise uses regional designations in Asia Minor). The explanation is that “Asia” was a provincial name of long standing. This area was bequeathed to Rome in 133 BCE and organized as a province in 129 BCE.³⁰ The province of Galatia, on the other hand, was established by Augustus in 25 BCE. The extra one hundred years gave time for the provincial name “Asia” to pass into common speech. Acts reveals this point admirably.

Our conclusion with regard to Burton’s first point (that by “Galatia” Paul meant the Roman province, since he always used Roman provincial names) is negative with regard to Asia Minor. Paul could and did use regional names, the clearest case being the areas that he knew best: Cilicia and Syria. I would suggest that *familiarity* also explains the usage of Acts: the author was well acquainted with the regions of Pisidia and Lycaonia, for which he used the regional names, but he had less knowledge of or interest in Thessaly and Attica, thus cheerfully bunching these and other Greek regions into the Roman province Achaia.

Although modern habits of speech cannot be decisive when considering ancient habits, it is noteworthy that today people who

30. See G. H. Stevenson, “The Provinces and Their Government,” in *CAH* 9:437–74, here 442, 448.

have good knowledge of a given part of the world often use regional names rather than the names of present-day districts, even after regional names have disappeared from maps. Thus, for example, East Anglia is frequently used to refer to territory that is now divided between Norfolk and Suffolk. A visitor who has a modern map will be able to find Norfolk and Suffolk, but not the older regional name, East Anglia. Those who know the land better, however, know and use “East Anglia.” I offer a second illustration: in 1973, the Government of Ontario combined three places into a new city called “Cambridge.” According to the Cambridge, Ontario, website, “even today, residents will tell the outside world that they call Cambridge home, [but] they will often identify themselves to each other as citizens of Galt or Preston or Hespeler.” It is very likely that the author of Acts and Paul, both of whom knew Asia Minor fairly well, used “Galatia” to refer to the ethnic region that bore that name.

What about Burton’s second point, that we have no definite knowledge of the existence of churches in regional Galatia, while Acts indicates that Paul did found churches in the southern part of the province Galatia? The statement is true, but we may doubt its relevance. This is basically a question about Acts: does Acts give a complete account of the places where Paul founded churches? Here the most important observation is that what Paul says about the origin of the churches in Galatia does not coincide with what Acts relates about the foundation of churches in “south Galatia” (Derbe, Lystra, Pisidian Antioch, and Iconium). According to Paul, it was “because of a physical infirmity” that he first preached the gospel to the Galatians (Gal. 4:13; the Greek for “physical infirmity” is “weakness of the flesh”). Acts says nothing about Paul’s interrupting his plans because of illness or injury. According to Acts, this was Paul’s itinerary when he founded the southern Galatian churches: by sea from Paphos (Cyprus) to Perga in Pamphylia, due north to Antioch in Pisidia, ESE

to Iconium, SSW to Lystra, SE to Derbe, back to Lystra, then back to Iconium, Antioch, and Attalia (the port just south of Perga), from which he sailed to Antioch in Syria (Acts 13:13—14:26). That is, the goal of this entire trip was to found churches in Pamphylia and the southern part of the province Galatia. He sailed there from Cyprus, won converts in each city, retraced his steps to the same churches, and then returned to Syria.

If it is true that the itinerary was thought out in advance and then executed, Paul could not conceivably have founded the churches in southern Galatia by accident because of physical infirmity. There was nothing accidental about the trip described in Acts.

This proves that Acts is not complete. It does not refer to the foundation of churches in any part of Asia Minor because of sickness or injury, which is all that Paul tells us about the Galatian churches. Thus the fact that Acts does not mention churches in regional Galatia is irrelevant: Acts leaves out the very circumstances in which Paul founded the churches mentioned in Gal. 4:13. If it left out this rather important fact, it could have left out other information as well.

This leads us to Burton's third argument, that Acts 16:6 and 18:23 are best interpreted as meaning that Paul did not found churches in ethnic Galatia. According to Acts 16, Paul and his companions revisited the churches in Derbe and the other southern Galatian cities, bypassed Asia, went through "the region [singular] of Phrygia and Galatia," came "opposite Mysia," were forbidden to enter Bithynia, turned west and bypassed Mysia, and went to Troas, whence they sailed to Macedonia. "Went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia" by no means excludes entry into regional Galatia. "The region of" might mean "along the border of," but according to the itinerary in Acts Paul at least went past ethnic Galatia. I would not rest a negative argument (that Paul did not go to regional Galatia) on Acts 16:1-10. Though Acts does not say so, it is quite possible that

on this trip Paul went through part of ethnic Galatia, became ill, and founded some churches before continuing on to Troas.

We should also note that in the itinerary of Acts 16:1-10 the author used the names of cities (Derbe, Lystra, and Iconium) and regions (Mysia, Bithynia, and Phrygia), but not provinces—except Asia. Acts ignores the fact that these cities were now in provincial Galatia.

Acts 18:22 and following is worth quoting in full:

When he landed at Caesarea, he went up [to Jerusalem?]³¹ and greeted the church, and then went down to [Syrian] Antioch. After spending some time there he departed and went from place to place through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

We shall consider “strengthening all the disciples” in 18:23 below. Now we note only that according to these verses Paul probably took the great northern route across Asia Minor that led from the Cilician Gates through Ancyra and past Pessinus, two of the four towns or cities of regional or ethnic Galatia, before he turned south.³² We must note, however, that in the space of two verses Paul goes from Caesarea to Jerusalem, to Antioch in Syria, through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, and to Ephesus: a lot of traveling and very limited information.

Now we shall see how our two representative scholars interpreted the two passages in Acts. First, Lightfoot on Acts 16:6:

The form of the Greek expression implies that Phrygia and Galatia here are not to be regarded as separate districts. The country which was now evangelized might be called indifferently Phrygia or Galatia. It was in fact the land originally inhabited by Phrygians, subsequently occupied by Gauls: or so far as he travelled beyond the limits of the Gallic settlement, it was still in the neighbouring parts of Phrygia that

31. Acts has only “went up.” Since “go up” is usual when referring to a trip to Jerusalem, most translations and commentaries supply “to Jerusalem” after “went up.”

32. On this route see M. P. Charlesworth, *Trade Routes and Commerce of the Roman Empire*, 2nd ed., repr. (1926; Chicago: Ares, 1974), 79.

he preached, which might fairly be included under one general expression.³³

Lightfoot put Galatians 4 (Paul preached in Galatia accidentally) in the context of Acts 16:6, which he understood as referring to regional Galatia. Later he interpreted Acts 18:23 as being a second visit to the same (unnamed) churches.³⁴

Burton agreed that “the region of Phrygia and Galatia” in Acts 16:6 refers to one region, but argued that the language of Acts 16 excludes the founding of churches: “Certainly the author would scarcely have described the journey through the Phrygian and Galatian country in the brief language of vv. 6, 7a if he had known that at this time Paul founded a group of churches.”³⁵

Burton employed a different argument, but achieved the same result, in dealing with Acts 18:23. We noted above that Acts 16:6 has “the region [sing.] of Phrygia and Galatia,” while 18:23 has a different formulation: literally, “the Galatian country and Phrygian” or “and Phrygia,” which allows for the possibility that these were two different places.³⁶ Burton seems to favor the view that on the journey of Acts 18 Paul went “through the Cilician Gates and *via* Tyana and the road south of Lake Tatta,” eventually coming to “Pessinus in the western part of old Galatia and so on through Phrygia to Ephesus.”³⁷ Pessinus is in regional Galatia.

I wish to pause here to explain one or two major points about crossing Asia Minor. Paul doubtless did this, probably more than once. At the eastern end of his journey lay Syrian Antioch and at the

33. Lightfoot, *Galatians*, 22.

34. *Ibid.*, 24f.

35. Burton, *Galatians*, xxxviii.

36. “Through the Galatian country and Phrygian” is perfectly acceptable Greek, but one cannot tell whether *Phrygian* in Greek is an adjective or a noun. Burton proposes that it is a noun, which leads to the translation “through the Galatian country and Phrygia.”

37. Tyana is immediately east of Lake Tatta, now called Tuz Gölü.

western end lay Ephesus, which was the largest port on the Aegean Sea. There were two roads running east-west by which one could go from Syria to the Aegean or back. One of these roads went around the salt lake (now Tuz Gölü) and the surrounding desert to the north, one to the south. The northern road, by far the older, was what the Greeks called the “Royal Road.” It was so named because it was the road used in the service of the Persian king when Persia held Asia Minor. The road ran approximately northeast from Ephesus to Ankara via Sardis, across the Sangarios River to Pessinus and then to Gordion. From there, one could turn south on the road from Sinope (on the Black Sea) to Cappadocia, continuing southeast through the Cilician Gates, and then either travel east to Syria and the Euphrates or south to Cilicia and its port, Tarsus. This route between Ephesus and Tarsus, based on the Royal Road, is obviously one that Paul could have traveled.³⁸ It passes directly through the heart of regional Galatia, Ancyra (modern Ankara), and one of its other principal cities, Pessinus, plus the smaller Galatian town Gordion (home of the knot that was famous in the day of Alexander the Great).³⁹

If one thinks of the trip from Ephesus to Cilicia or Syria, however, the Royal Road involves a very long detour to the north. As William Ramsey explained long ago, there obviously had been a great empire in the northern part of Asia Minor that required the creation of this great road. It is notable that the builders of the Royal Road preferred

38. See the great work by W. M. Ramsay, *The Historical Geography of Asia Minor*, Royal Geographical Society Supplemental Papers (London: John Murray, 1890; repr. Elibron Classics, 2005), 27–35. One might have expected roads and travel to be covered in Ramsay’s *St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1896), which in fact is a commentary on Acts with relatively little travel information. It should be noted that there is a somewhat different description of this road in M. P. Charlesworth, *Trade Routes*, 79: the western part of the road “ran up the Maeander valley past Laodicea and Apamea, Synnada and Pessinus, to Ancyra.” Such a road would pass south of Sardis before turning sharply north.

39. From Ancyra, besides going north to the Black Sea or south to the Mediterranean, one could also take a road to the Bosphorus, leading to Thessalonica, Byzantium, and then to the *via Egnatia* to Rome.

“the direct path to the easy one.” This marks it as having military/governmental functions.⁴⁰

The empire that Ramsey hypothesized, we now know, was that of the Hittites, who held varying parts of Asia Minor and Syria for a long period, approximately the seventeenth century to the twelfth century BCE. Famously, they held the field against Ramses II in about 1274 BCE. Part of the road system of this great empire, doubtless with some changes, still functioned in Paul’s day. Along its route we find the cities of regional Galatia: besides Pessinus, Gordion, and Ancyra, mentioned above, also Tavium in the eastern part of Galatia.

Much later, perhaps beginning in the fifth century BCE,⁴¹ trade led merchants to forge a southern route from Ephesus through the Cilician Gates, passing south of the salt lake. This we may call in full “the great Eastern highway of the Greco-Roman period.” The builders of this road preferred the easy path to the faster one (faster if one thinks of the military usage of the northern route, via war horses and chariots).⁴² Traders, whose teams of animals pulled heavy drays, wished to avoid steep inclines if they could.

Paul could have taken either route. But, if he wanted to stay in the south, he would probably have done what he does in Acts 14, when he went to Derbe and elsewhere: go by sea, which was far easier than either overland route.

We cannot know enough about what was in his mind and what his circumstances were to say much more, but if (as I think) he made converts in regional Galatia, he went there intentionally, probably because he took the Royal Road from Cilicia through Galatia (and also through part of Phrygia).

Back to Burton: the view that Paul took the great Eastern highway,

40. Ramsay, *Historical Geography*, 38.

41. *Ibid.*, 36.

42. *Ibid.*, 38.

which ran south of the salt lake, and then turned north to Pessinus before reversing himself and going southwest to Ephesus, is a bit odd. Burton proposes that he did this because Acts 18:23, which Burton assigns to the southern route, mentions Phrygia and Galatia. But this quick swing up to one of the Galatian cities is an oddity in his argument.

At any rate, despite the view of Acts that Paul was twice in or on the border of regional Galatia, Burton maintained that there still was no proof that there were any *churches* in regional Galatia. Acts 18:23 states that Paul strengthened “the disciples,” not churches, and the passage shows that there were “scattered disciples in this region (found or made on his previous journey),” but no churches.⁴³

Finally, Burton stated that

All forms of the North-Galatian view with its hypothesis of churches in old Galatia labour under the disadvantage that its sole evidence for the existence of any churches in northern Galatia is found in two passages, both somewhat obscure, in a writer who, though doubtless in general trustworthy, is not always accurate.⁴⁴

Burton has, in my view, given the game away. The entirety of his long discussion of Acts 16:6 and 18:23⁴⁵ is based on the assumption of total accuracy. Thus he can distinguish the wording of 16:6 from that of 18:23 and discover two different itineraries. Similarly he knows that there were “disciples” in regional Galatia, but not churches, since Acts 18:23 says “disciples.” Moreover, he “knows” that the author “would scarcely have described the journey through the Phrygian and Galatian country in the brief language of vv. 6, 7a if he had known that at this time Paul founded a group of churches.”⁴⁶ Burton

43. Burton, *Galatians*, xl, xli.

44. *Ibid.*, xl; see also p. xliv.

45. *Ibid.*, xxx–xli.

46. *Ibid.*, xxxviii.

then argues against the opposing camp by saying that those in it must rely on two references in Acts, a work that is not always accurate!

Let us note the curiosity of “strengthening disciples” in regional Phrygia and Galatia, where there were no churches. Burton seems not to have considered the possibility that Acts wrote “disciples” whereas Paul wrote “churches” or “congregations,” and that this may be only a difference of terminology. In any case, on Burton’s view, we find that Paul knew scattered disciples south of Lake Tatta, in a region where, according to Burton’s interpretation of Acts 16, Paul had never preached. We see in Burton’s work the vast effort to preserve the literal sense of every single word in Acts when there are simpler explanations.

I do not myself find the exegesis of these two verses in Acts to be compelling one way or the other. The author of Acts, as both Lightfoot and Burton knew (though Burton sometimes forgot), did not write a complete or a perfectly accurate version of Paul’s travels. To go back to an earlier point: Acts does not in any way hint at a pause because of illness or injury. Burton, following Acts slavishly, in effect denies that there was such a pause, or at least that there was such a pause during which Paul founded churches. But that is the only thing that Paul himself tells us.

In the end, I find Lightfoot’s most important argument to be the most decisive point: “Galatia” in popular speech meant regional or “northern” Galatia. Acts’ geographical references (contrary to Burton’s view) certainly allow this conclusion, and they seem to me to support it. (Acts 16:6 and 18:23 refer to Phrygia, which was never a province; most of it was in the province of Asia, but some was in regional Galatia.)

But rather than rely on these two verses to settle a difficult question, it is better to come to a different understanding of Acts. Acts loses track of Paul in chapter 16, where it sounds as if Paul went

from Lystra and Derbe (16:1) through Phrygia and Galatia, north to Bithynia, and west to Troas, without converting anyone, because the Spirit forbade him to speak in Asia or Bithynia—but not, presumably, in the “region of Phrygia and Galatia.” So what did he do on this long trip? Acts is silent. Chapter 18 leaves out even more. Even those who never doubt Acts’ theory of three missionary journeys should be able to see some gaps.

Thus for those who wish to save the *general* reliability of Acts, I would suggest that the author vaguely alludes to journeys and visits that he does not describe. As I wrote above, it takes only three verses to get Paul from Caesarea to Ephesus, a trip that consumed several months. At best, this leaves out a lot, and we must assume other omissions elsewhere in the narrative.

Who Were the Galatians and Where Did They Come From?⁴⁷

The original heartland of the Celtic people seems to have been the upper Danube, from France in the west to Bohemia in the east. The term “Celt” refers to the people who spoke a Celtic language, not to a nation of genetically related people. Part of their history can be reconstructed from archaeology (the La Tène period), but soon they begin to appear in Greek and Latin sources. At some point they spread into what is now France. Probably because of pressure from immigrating Germanic or Teutonic tribes, but perhaps also in search of plunder and adventure, many of them immigrated, some over the Alps into Italy, some southwest into Spain, and a large number southeast into the Balkans. The first appearance of Celts in Greece was as mercenaries in 369–368 BCE.⁴⁸

47. For the following history, see J. M. de Navarro, “The Coming of the Celts,” *CAH* 7:41–74; W. W. Tarn, “The Invasion of the Gauls,” *CAH* 7:101–6; Jones, “The Gauls,” *Cities*, 111–23; Richard D. Sullivan, “Galatia,” in *Near Eastern Royalty and Rome* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 48–51.

48. *CAH* 7:64.

In 279 BCE, a group of Celts invaded Macedonia and then ventured into Greece to loot Delphi. At first they were successful, but at Delphi they were turned back and retreated with heavy losses.

En route to Macedonia, however, two tribes broke away: the Tolistobogii and the Trocmi. Instead of continuing east with the other tribes, they worked their way south to the Mediterranean Sea, presumably plundering along the way, and marched on to the Dardanelles, hoping to cross into Asia Minor, where there were many riches to be seized. Nicomedes I of Bithynia (northern Asia Minor) wanted their help in taking possession of his kingdom, and he assisted them in crossing into Asia Minor. Nicomedes formed an alliance with Mithradates of Pontus (also in northern Asia Minor) against the Seleucids, and the two kings encouraged the Celts to plunder the rest of Asia Minor in order to weaken the Seleucids (the descendants of a general in the army of Alexander the Great, who seized Syria and much of Asia Minor after Alexander's death).

At some point the two Celtic tribes were joined by a third, the Tectosages. They divided the territory up and plundered away. There were no more than thirty thousand fighting men in the three tribes (possibly fewer), but they wreaked havoc. In Tarn's words, "seldom can so few men have created such a panic."⁴⁹ Many cities paid bribes to save their lands from being despoiled and ravaged.

Antiochus, the Seleucid king, finally defeated them in 275 BCE. Mithradates and Nicomedes settled the Celtic tribes in northern Phrygia, where they constituted a bulwark against the Seleucids. I quote the conclusion of this part of the story from Tarn:

[T]he Seleucids were too fully occupied elsewhere ever to deal radically with the barbarians [the Celts], and for many years they exacted tribute from the Seleucid kings as a condition of sparing their cities, and a special "Galatia" tax was raised from the cities to pay it. Galatia was

49. *CAH* 7:105.

a poor country, but it gave the Gauls what they wanted, strongholds in which to leave their families and booty while they raided. . . . The Phrygian peasants tilled the land for them, and they increased fast, but did not occupy any towns till much later; for long they kept their native customs, a foreign body which the Seleucid empire could not assimilate, always ready to sell their swords to the highest bidder.⁵⁰

The warlike Celts, bought off from their primary occupation, plunder, became mercenaries. They had the misfortune of hiring themselves out to Antiochus (the Seleucid king) when he fought the Romans at Magnesia. Rome eventually retaliated, as was its custom. “In 189 BCE, Gnaeus Manlius Volso invaded them in their own homes, and defeated them in two great battles with enormous slaughter.” Asia Minor erupted in celebrations, and “the Gauls sank into insignificance.”⁵¹

The insignificance, however, was not terminal. The Celts were deprived of two of their regular sources of income, which had brought a lot of money into their otherwise poor land: plunder and ransom or tribute for not plundering. They could, however, still hire out as mercenaries.

Two substantial changes now began, which would transform the customs of the region. The first was slow Hellenization. Prior to their crushing defeat, the Celts had never accommodated themselves to the prevailing culture; but, deprived of some of the aspects of their old way of life, they began to Hellenize. The signal is proper names. In the first century BCE many of the Galatian aristocrats had Greek names, and there is one reference to a gymnastic contest.⁵² In A. H. M. Jones’s view, “by the second century [CE] the hellenization of the upper classes seems to have been fairly complete.”⁵³

50. *CAH* 7:106.

51. Jones, *Cities*, 114–15.

52. *Ibid.*, 121.

53. *Ibid.*

The second development, which doubtless greatly assisted the first, was that many of the Galatians now became loyal allies of Rome in her numerous endeavors in Asia Minor. In the Roman civil wars, Galatians were found fighting on each side—which shows that they still found employment as mercenaries. In the series of three vast civil wars from the time of Julius Caesar to Octavian, the Romans in effect agreed not to ravage Italy, and the wars were fought, and the troops raised, in Asia Minor and Greece. Fortunately the victors (Caesar over Pompey, Anthony and Octavian over Brutus and Cassius, and Octavian over Anthony) understood that people loyal to Rome had a hard time deciding on the “right” side of a civil war, and there were few if any bad consequences for the mercenaries who fought on the losing side.

Apart from the civil wars, the most important wars during the time of Galatian loyalty to Rome were the Mithridatic wars, waged between Rome and their ablest and most troublesome enemy in the east, Mithridates VI of Pontus (who ruled from c. 120 to 63 BCE). Access to Pontus could be difficult, but a route ran through Galatia. Though some Galatians served under Mithridates, tens of thousands joined Lucullus when he attacked Pontus in 72 BCE. From the second Mithridatic War (83) on, one Deiotarus, a chieftain of the Tolistobogii, played a leading role. After Pompey’s decisive defeat of Mithridates VI (66–63 BCE), Deiotarus was made sole head of his tribe and received other holdings on the Black Sea as well. The Roman Senate declared him king of Galatia in 59 BCE.

This was against the Galatian “constitution,” since the Celts traditionally were divided into tribes and each tribe had its own leaders. Thus to be king, Deiotarus had to employ brute force. A lot of intrigue and a good number of assassinations followed, but with the support of Cicero and others, Deiotarus retained his position, though Caesar, after defeating Pompey, took away some of

Deiotarus's land. He died before 40 BCE, having changed Galatia "from a tribal society to a kingdom."⁵⁴

Deiotarus's son, Castor II, officially succeeded, but his name soon drops out of history, and by 36 BCE Antony had recognized one Amyntas, said to have been Deiotarus's secretary, as king. He proved to be an extremely able ruler. He adroitly changed his allegiance from Antony to Octavian and became one of Octavian's ablest supporters in Asia Minor, which resulted in the increase of his holdings. Amyntas fell in battle, attempting to subdue mountain tribes, in 25 BCE, and Augustus (as Octavian was by then) turned his lands into the huge province of Galatia.⁵⁵

Before losing their independent identity, under Amyntas the Galatians had again become militarily prominent in Asia Minor and had governed large portions of it. They were among the chief enablers of Roman success. The days of pillage and tribute were well behind them, and many of them were no longer rural hicks or country bumpkins. At least the well-to-do were fairly well Hellenized. The Celtic language, however, continued to be spoken in the countryside into the fifth century CE.⁵⁶

So whom did Paul convert in Galatia? Martyn has a proposal that is precise and concise: "The Galatian churches, perhaps only two in number, were almost certainly located in the Hellenized Celtic cities of Ankyra and Pessinus (with possibly a third church in the trading center of Tavium)."⁵⁷ Lightfoot's view was the same, though he listed Gordion as a further possibility.⁵⁸ This completes the list of sizable towns or cities in regional Galatia (Tavium apparently was quite small).

54. Sullivan, *Near Eastern Royalty*, 163–74, quotation from p. 169.

55. *Ibid.*, 169–70.

56. Jones, *Cities*, 122, citing Jerome and a story about St. Euthymius.

57. Martyn, *Galatians*, 16–17.

58. Lightfoot, *Galatians*, 20.

There is no evidence on the basis of which to question Martyn's view, which is a quite natural one, since it was Paul's habit to go to cities, and all of the other congregations of which we know were in sizable cities or at least large towns. But I would like to note that the establishment of Christian communities in Galatia was unique, since Paul preached there only because of a physical affliction. It would seem to me to be at least theoretically possible that Paul was smitten in a lesser place, a village or small town, and that his presence attracted people from nearby villages. He would have been a very noteworthy figure in a rural or semi-rural setting and might have attracted hearers from miles around—resulting in small congregations in a few villages.

We do, however, have to agree that he founded more than one congregation, since the plural appears in the address: "to the churches of Galatia." Moreover, if he had founded a church in only one city, he almost certainly would have used the city name in the address.

Staying with the hypothesis of two or more cities, which is, on balance, more probable, we must then observe that this assumes a fairly lengthy trip through at least half of Galatia. In an oval almost three hundred miles long, Pessinus is at the southwest corner and Tavium at the western edge, with Ancyra about halfway in between; Gordion is between Pessinus and Ancyra. Therefore we should not assume (returning to our study of Acts) that Paul barely touched the edge of Galatia while on route from Pisidia to Troas. The theory of two or more cities implies that he was traveling from west to east, or east to west, along the Royal Road, the great northern route from the Cilician Gates, through Ancyra, past Pessinus, heading toward the western part of Asia Minor or beyond (see pp. 767–69 above).

If the congregations were separated by fifty or more miles, it can hardly be possible that *all* of the converts in these scattered cities saw Paul during his affliction. The passage seems to imply that the

recipients of the letter had seen him during his illness or at the time of his injury:

You know that it was because of a physical infirmity that I first announced the gospel to you; though my condition put you to the test, you did not scorn or despise me, but welcomed me as a angel of God, as Christ Jesus. What has become of the good will you felt? For I testify that, had it been possible, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. (Gal. 4:13-15)

This is the language of *immediacy*: they saw him when he was not a pretty sight. This can hardly apply equally to congregations separated from each other by a journey of three or more days. It is possible, of course, that he had three congregations located a hundred miles or so apart, and that the passage really applies to only one of them.

I am not sure, in short, that we should entirely give up the possibility that the churches were in a rural area and that people had flocked from different villages to see the traveling missionary. Galatians poses numerous issues, many of which cannot be resolved. I do not think that we can be sure that we know precisely where the churches were to which Paul wrote his most moving and stirring letter.

Glossary

Agrippa

Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa, *c.* 63 BCE – 12 CE. The “right hand man” of Augustus, friend of Herod, supporter of Jewish rights.

Alexander III (the Great) of Macedon, 356-323 BCE

The conqueror of the Persian Empire, which had extended from Iran to the western coast of Asia Minor. Persia had twice invaded Greece.

Apocalyptic, apocalypticism

Disclosure of future events by revelations, dreams, and the like.

Augustus, 63 BCE–14 CE

The first Roman emperor. His original name was Gaius Octavius; he is now usually called “Octavian.” He was the great nephew of Julius Caesar; Caesar adopted him, making him his heir. When Octavian became the supreme ruler of Rome, he took the title **Augustus**, meaning “revered,” “venerable,” or “majestic.”

Caiphas, Joseph

Jewish High Priest 18–36 CE, who recommended Jesus' execution to Pontius Pilate.

Cephas

See **Simon Peter**

Critical texts

Annotated texts based on the principled comparison of manuscripts of the New Testament; for example, Barbara Aland, et al., eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012).

Dead Sea Sect

A dissident Jewish community in the Second Temple period, so named because knowledge of the sect is provided by the Dead Sea Scrolls, which were discovered in and around Khirbet Qumran near the Dead Sea.

Decapolis

A group of ten autonomous Greco-Roman cities, including Damascus, on the northeast border of Judea and the southeast border of Galilee.

Deutero-Pauline letters

Letters attributed to Paul but probably written in his name by a follower or followers. *See* **The seven undisputed Pauline letters**.

Diaspora

A peaceful dispersion of people to other lands.

Eschatology

Discussion of or thought about last things.

Exegesis and over-exegesis

Exegesis is the interpretation of a (usually ancient) text—for example, Paul’s interpretation of the Greek text of Genesis, or our interpretation of his letters. *Over-exegesis* refers to reading more into a text than is probably there.

False apostles

See **super-apostles**.

Gaius Octavius

See **Augustus**

Gamaliel I

Or *Gamliel*, a Pharisaic sage and member of the Sanhedrin in the first century; according to Acts, Paul’s teacher in Jerusalem.

Halakah

A Jewish rule of behavior, pl. **Halakôt**. The **Halakah** can also refer to the Jewish system of laws, as distinct from Haggadah, non-legal subjects.

Hasmonean priest-kings

See **The Hellenistic dynasties**, below.

Hellenes

The Greek word for Greeks.

Hellenic

An adjective referring to Greek culture.

Hellenistic

An adjective meaning “somewhat Greek” in culture and used to describe the spread of aspects of Greek culture in the wake of Alexander’s conquests.

Hellenistic dynasties

In the course of the book we meet the **Seleucid Empire**, the **Ptolemaic Kingdom**, and the **Hasmonean** priest-kings. The Seleucids, the Ptolemies, and the Hasmoneans (also called the Maccabees) were all Hellenistic dynasties, governed by a hereditary ruler. The Seleucid Empire and the Ptolemaic Kingdom were created by two of the leading generals of Alexander the Great after his death. The generals divided up the vast empire among themselves. Seleucus I Nicator, who was based in Babylonia, expanded his domain until it included Syria and Asia Minor. The Ptolemies, beginning with Ptolemy I Soter, ruled Egypt and did not establish a far-flung empire.

The vast territory held by Seleucus and his descendants was beset by invaders and groups who wanted freedom. One rebel group, the Hasmoneans (Maccabees), succeeded in freeing their territory, Jewish Palestine, from Seleucid control. The ruling figure in the Hasmonean

dynasty was High Priest as well as king. (The Jews had been ruled for centuries by High Priests.) The behavior of the Hasmonean dynasts was the same as that of the rulers of other Hellenistic kingdoms.

The Seleucids and Ptolemies seized their allotted territories shortly after Alexander's death in 323 BCE, and they held them until Rome took over their part of the world. Rome advanced rather slowly, and some of the Hellenistic dynasties lasted longer than others.

The Hasmonean dynasty began in 164 BCE, when after a defeat of the Seleucid Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the temple in Jerusalem was purified. The dynasty lasted until *c.* 63 BCE, when the Roman general Pompey made some rearrangements in the governance of the Jewish state. Roman influence expanded, and in 37 BCE the Roman Senate declared a non-Hasmonean, Herod (the Great), to be the king of Judea.

Hellenistic historiography

The practice of history-writing in the ancient Greek world, which included crafting likely speeches for prominent characters; Thucydides (*c.* 460–400 BCE) both practiced and described the art.

Herod (the Great), *c.* 74–4 BCE

From 37 to 4 BCE the king of Judea.

Herod Agrippa I, 11 BCE–44 CE

Herod's grandson, appointed king of Judea by the Emperor Claudius.

Imperial province

C. 27 BCE Augustus divided the provinces of the Roman Empire into "Imperial provinces," ruled by himself and subject to martial law, and "Senatorial provinces," partially governed locally by Greek-style

constitutions (a council of elders, etc.), but overseen by a Roman proconsul, who was appointed annually by the Senate.

James the brother of the Lord

Though not a disciple during Jesus' lifetime, James saw the risen Lord and became a major figure in the early church.

Josephus, c. 37–100 CE

An aristocratic Jewish Priest who fought in the First Jewish revolt against Rome. Because of a dream, he decided that God intended Rome to win. He became a translator for Titus, the Roman general whose army destroyed Jerusalem (70 CE). Josephus was taken to Rome where he wrote about Judaism and the major Jewish revolt against Rome.

Julius Caesar, c. 100–March 44 BCE

A great Roman general who wanted tyrannical powers. His assassination eventually led to the rise of Octavian to supreme power in Rome.

LXX

70 in Roman numerals. The abbreviation refers to the **Septuagint**, the Greek translation of the Jewish Scriptures, produced in Alexandria, Egypt, at an unknown date. It was a tradition that there were 72 (or, in an alternative tradition, 70) translators.

Miqveh, pl. Miqva'ôt

A pool dug into bedrock, used for religious purification.

The Mishnah

A collection of *halakhôt* attributed to early Rabbis.

Nicolaus of Damascus, c. 64 BCE – ?

A supremely erudite philosopher and historian who became the secretary and spokesman of Herod, and whose books on history were a major source of Josephus's histories.

North Galatia Hypothesis

The hypothesis that Paul's addressees in Galatians referred to a relatively small ethnic region in Asia Minor where Celts were settled. See chapter 16 and Appendix II.

Octavian

See **Augustus**

Over-exegesis

See **exegesis**

Pastoral Epistles

The collective name for 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus, which are **Deutero-Pauline letters**.

Pharisees

One of the major Jewish parties in the second temple period. They accepted a body of oral tradition in addition to the written Torah and beliefs not expressly described in Torah, such as the resurrection of

the dead. Josephus says they were more popular than the Sadducees among the people.

Philo of Alexandria

Jewish philosopher, Biblical exegete, and civic leader in Alexandria, Egypt. The only known date in his life is 39–40 CE, when he led an embassy to Gaius (Caligula) to protest against the Roman treatment of the Jews in Alexandria.

Pontius Pilate

Prefect of Judaea 26–36 CE, who ordered the execution of Jesus.

Presuppositions

Contemporary texts, like ancient ones, *presuppose* the reader understands certain things. One task of historical exegesis is to discover the presuppositions of an ancient text.

Ptolemy, Ptolemaic kingdom

See Hellenistic dynasties, above.

Qumran or Khirbet Qumran

Archaeological site inhabited from the late second century BCE to the first century CE. Since the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in nearby caves, Qumran has been identified as the site where the scrolls were likely written or copied.

Rabbinic Judaism

The form of Judaism that began after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE. The leaders took the title “Rabbi,” “My great one.” Their

principal activity was interpreting and teaching the Torah, following the principles of the **Pharisees**. This has remained the dominant form of Judaism.

Sadducees

One of the major Jewish parties in the second temple period. They held to the authority of the written Torah alone.

Second Temple Period, c. 530 BCE–70 CE

The period began with the return to Judea of the exiles from Babylon in the fifth century BCE and concluded when a Roman army destroyed the temple at the end of the Jewish revolt.

Seleucid Empire

After Alexander's death in 323 BCE, the Hellenistic kingdom founded by Seleucus I Nicator. *See* **The Hellenistic dynasties, above**.

Senatorial provinces.

See **Imperial provinces**

Septuagint

See **LXX**

The seven undisputed Pauline letters

The letters attributed to Paul that beyond doubt were written or dictated by Paul himself. In biblical order, they are: Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, Philemon.

Simon bar Jonah

The leading disciple of Jesus, to whom he gave the title or nickname “Rock,” which is “Kephas” in Aramaic and “Petros” in Greek. In English, Kephas becomes Cephas and Petros becomes Peter. Paul called him both Kephas and Petros.

Sons of Zebedee

Two brothers, James and John, who were disciples of Jesus.

Soteriology

An understanding of salvation.

South Galatia Hypothesis

The hypothesis that the Galatians Paul addressed in his letter were inhabitants of the Roman province of Galatia (as suggested in Acts). See chap. 16 and Appendix II.

Super-apostles

Paul’s opponents in 2 Corinthians, whom he apparently also regards as “false apostles” (2 Cor. 11:13).

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